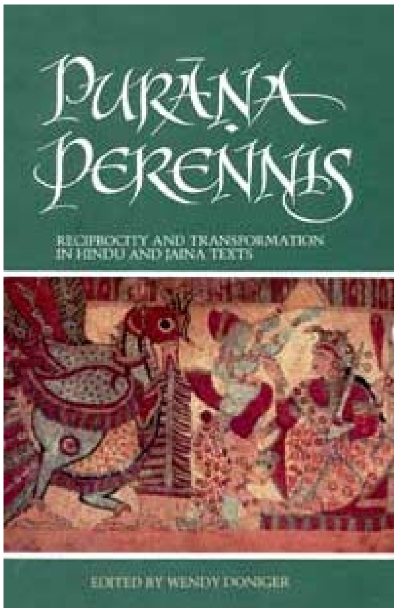



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# Purana Perennis

## Reciprocity and Transformation in Hindu and Jaina Texts

Edited by
Wendy Doniger

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*for all the Davids*

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CONTENTS

# INTRODUCTION

*Ezekiel saw the wheel, 'way up in the middle of the air,*
*Ezekiel saw the wheel, 'way up in the middle of the air.*
*And the little wheel ran by faith, and the big wheel ran by*
*the grace of God.*
*'Tis a wheel in a wheel, 'way up in the middle of the air.*
Traditional African-American song

*And when I looked, behold the four wheels by the cherubim, one wheel by one cherub, and another wheel by another cherub; and the appearance of the wheels was like the color of a beryl stone. And as for their appearances, they four had one likeness, as if a wheel had been in the midst of a wheel.*
Ezekiel 10.9-10

The Hebrew Bible version of the vision of Ezekiel speaks of a wheel within a wheel; the African-American version speaks of two wheels, one of faith and the other of grace. These two texts might themselves be regarded as a wheel within a wheel, two interlocking interpretations, one written, one oral; one ancient, one modern; one Jewish, one Christian. The texts that are the subject of this volume also run on those two sets of wheels, written and oral, ancient and modern, and, in this case, Hindu and Jaina. The little wheel of faith (*sraddha*)might stand for the so-called Great Tradition of India, to borrow Robert Redfield's seminal terminology for the pan-Indian Sanskritic tradition that self-consciously traces its lineage back to the Veda and the Epics. The big wheel of the grace of God (*bhakti*)might stand for the equally so-called Little Tradition of India, the village tradition of localized, vernacular, basically oral culture.





That the Little Tradition is the big wheel rather than the little wheel should not surprise us; the Redfield model has begun to turn upside down, or inside out. In the hands of Redfield (whom a colleague once described, unkindly, as a man who went around kicking in open doors), it began a fruitful conversation. But in later years, and in other hands, it was invoked, more

often than not, to argue that vernacular myths and rituals were, in comparison with their Sanskrit counterparts, late and low (or, to use the phrase that F. Max Müller applied to myth in comparison with religion, "silly, senseless, and savage"). The paradigm was also used to draw too sharp a line between these presumably high and low cultures, ignoring the fact that a Brahmin who wrote a Sanskrit text with one hand (his right, one assumed) was also quite likely to be the author of a Tamil oral tale with the other hand (presumably the left). Or, to use A. K. Ramanujan's terminology, every Indian who had Sanskrit as his father tongue had a vernacular as his mother tongue.

Finally, in the decades since Redfield's work the most vibrant strain in Indology has concentrated on the Little Tradition, making it major in many important senses. Thus the concept of the "Great and Little Traditions" has proved to be a ladder that we used to get where we are now but must now kick out from under us, or at least modify in major ways. The wheel is within the wheelbut which is the center and which the periphery? Or would it be better to say that each is within the other?

The essays in this volume grew out of a conference on the Puranas at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, in August 1985, a conference organized by Velcheru Narayana Rao, generously supported by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, and attended by Purana scholars from India and Europe as well as America. Among the participants was Ludo Rocher, whose work on the Puranas has culminated not in a paper for this volume but in a volume that has immediately become the standard work on the subject, encompassing and extending the previous base established by the work of R. C. Hazra. 1 Rocher's work is cited by many of the authors in this volume and is the base from which we all implicitly proceed.2

The discussion at that conference ranged widely, as do the texts that inspired it, but time and again we found ourselves returning to one central theme: the relationship between the so-called Mahapuranas, or "Great" Puranas, of the Sanskrit tradition (themselves texts that the Indologist, i.e., Sanskritic, Establishment largely ignored) and the many other sorts of Puranas. These latter were regarded (by those few Indologists who knew them at all) as



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poor cousins of the already poor Mahapuranas, and included the Upapuranas, or "Subpuranas," of the Sanskrit tradition (which do not, be it noted, correspond to the Little Tradition texts); the *sthalapuranas* of the Dravidian Hindu traditions; and the Puranas of other South Asian traditions, such as the Jainas. If Vedic texts were the Brahmins of Indology, the Puranas were the Untouchables. We all felt that a study of these neglected traditions was long overdue, as a kind of Puranic affirmative action. The essays in this book represent a first step in that direction.

The readers of the manuscript (C. Mackenzie Brown, Ludo Rocher, Herman Tull, and two who preferred, like Pauranikas, to remain anonymous) offered many useful suggestions for improvements but basically agreed with us that such a study was badly needed. One anonymous reader rather grudgingly acknowledged:

> The literature . . . covered in this volume has attracted few Western scholars; the book covers an area of research in which there are few published monographs in English. The original texts are not found in most University libraries. The journals (mostly Indian) which contain some information on this topic are equally inaccessible. Thus the present volume fulfills a need . . . As Indian Studies progresses, scholars are giving more attention to texts which are little discussed in the standard manuals and books in the field. Indianists now are more concerned to sort out the mutual influences of the well-known pan-Indian texts and more localized or "sectarian" traditions. The book makes a contribution here . . . All the articles attempt, in different ways, to advance knowledge in the field and in some instances to re-orient scholarly thinking on this extensive body of knowledge.

And another reader said, with a bit more enthusiasm, "This is a collection of articles by leading scholars in their fields. Such a collection naturally demands our attention. Without exception the articles are intellectually stimulating, demanding, and instructive . . . The topic is very important."

C. Mackenzie Brown particularly liked "the attempt on the part of some of the authors to grapple with the problem of what the 'Puranic process' is, using a wide variety of examples drawn from important but relatively less well known texts, [and] the richness of insights in many of the individual essays. As a whole, they give the reader who is already somewhat familiar with Puranic literature a much more intimate feel of what it is like to live in a Puranicized



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world, and of what is involved in constructing and/or transforming that world from within." And Herman Tull commented, "The Puranas, despite all their peculiarities and pretensions, are essentially collections of stories. And the authors of the essays collected in *Purana Perennis* are all superb story-tellers. They are also top-notch scholars. [The volume] is emblematic of the most important current in Indological studies in the last twenty years."

Since most of us have been one anothers' friends, colleagues, teachers, and students for decades, editing the papers felt to me more like attending a family party than chairing an academic gathering. Indeed, were it not for the presence of our two Jaina cousins, the Hindu-wallahs would have constituted an almost incestuously insular group. The authors, as well as their texts, suffer (or benefit, depending upon your point of view) from a very real sort of intertextuality. This being so, I was pleased to find that we did in fact disagree in several of our approaches to the central problems of definition and interpretation. Since most of the authors have agendas that relate to reading the Puranas as a whole, over and above their particular foci, they deal, often quite differently, with many of the same central issues. Thus, for example, the classical list of the "five distinguishing marks" (*pañcalaksana*)is utilized in rather different ways by Narayana Rao, Shulman, Hardy, Cort, and Jaini. The *Bhagavata Purana* also proved to be the key to several different sorts of arguments, as it was discussed in relationship to the *Devibhagavata Purana* (Doniger and Hardy), the *Mahabhagavata Purana* (Shulman), and the Jaina version of the *Bhagavata Purana* (Jaini). The *Bhagavata Purana* also served as a bridge between other issues, forming as it does a link between the Sanskrit North and the Dravidian South and between Vedic and Puranic Sanskrit. There are also more specific resonances between the papers: thus, for example, in addition to the more detailed resonances (even arguments) between Cort and Jaini, Ramanujan and Doniger speak of the "scrap Purana" (the *Skanda*), Patton and Doniger cite different versions of the myths of Urvasi and Utathya, Patton and Shulman discuss very different aspects of *bhakti*, and Hardy and Doniger bring out different aspects of the myths of the *linga* and of the sinner saved from hell. The essays in this collection constitute a kind of Venn diagram of intersecting concerns of authors attempting to trace general patterns within a set of most unruly texts.

It might at first appear that some of these essays are about ideology (political)a contemporary (or, if you don't like it, trendy) subject, while others are about theology (religious)a traditional (or, if you don't like it, reactionary) subject. But, as Laurie L. Patton





reminds us from the start, theology *is* an ideology, and our authors explore various sorts of ideologies, Brahminic, subversive, feminist, and so forth. Patton explores the theology of the *rsi*s, while Narayana Rao writes about the self-definition and Brahminic ideology of the Puranas. Doniger and Ramanujan, through mythological and literary/semiotic analysis, respectively, draw out certain counter-cultural and feminist ideologies from their texts, while Shulman's text might, in other hands, be used in the service of colonial and subaltern discourse, for Rudyard Kipling's "How the Elephant Got His Nose," in his *Just-So Stories*, is surely a satire on the myth of Gajendra. Hardy charts a number of rational and rationalizing ideological strategies working within the constraints of localism. And Hardy, Jaini, and Cort trace the lineage of an agonistic interaction between Hindus and Jainas, each group encompassing the ideology of the other by laying claim to the same Puranic subjects. A wheel within a wheel.

The Hindu-Jaina exchange is not the only reciprocal one, however. For this whole book is about reciprocal transformations, the two-way stretch (what we call "chicken-and-egg" and Indians call "seed-and-tree") of the Great and Little Traditions, with constant cybernetic feedback between pan-Indian culture and localized culture, rather than subordination of one to the other, as has often been reductionistically supposed. These reciprocal transformations operate between Veda and Purana (Patton) and among Epic, Mahapurana, and Upapurana (Doniger); between North and South, in several branches: Sanskrit and Telugu (Narayana Rao), Sanskrit and Kannada (Ramanujan), Sanskrit and Tamil (Shulman), and Sanskrit, Tamil, and Prakrit (Hardy); and, finally, between Hindu and Jaina (Hardy, Jaini, and Cort).

In the hope of making the book accessible to a nonspecialist audience, I have tried to de-Sanskritize it as far as possible. This editing is the reverse of the process that M. N. Srinivas called "Sanskritization." For where castes rise in both status and power by Sanskritizing, texts fall in status but rise in (readership) power by de-Sanskritizing. (The chapter by John E. Cort, being in part a bibliographical essay, necessarily contains more Sanskrit than the other essays.) Nevertheless, there is a bare minimum of Sanskrit terminology shared by these essays that even the non-Indologist reader might be expected to learn or to ignore, as the case might be: *asura* (an anti-god), *apsaras* (a celestial nymph or courtesan), *bhakta* (a devotee), *bhakti* (devotion, passionate love of God for worshipper and worshipper for God), *brahman* (ultimate reality), *dharma* (religious law), *gandharva* (a demigod, celestial musician), *Kali Age*

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(the last, and worst, of the four ages), *karma* (the effects of past actions on future lives), *kavya* (ornate poetry), *kinnara* (a mythical beast, half horse and half demigod), *lila* (play, divine sport), *linga* (the erect phallus of the god Siva), *mantra* (a hymn, particularly a Vedic hymn), *maya* (illusion), *moksa* (release or liberation, especially from the wheel of rebirth), *pañcalaksana* (the five distinguishing marks of a Purana), *phalasruti* (the fruit gained by hearing a Purana), *raksasa* (minor demon), *rsi* (a seer, or sage), *samsara* (the wheel of rebirth, involvement in ordinary life), *sastra* (a science or an authoritative scientific text), *smrti* (texts, such as the Epics, Puranas, and *dharmasastras*, created and "remembered" by humans), *sruti* (texts, such as the Vedas, created by gods and "heard" by humans), *sthalapurana* (local Purana), *stotra* (hymn of praise), *tapas* (inner heat produced by asceticism), and *yaksa* (a demigod associated with magic and fertility). Further information about Sanskrit terms is provided in the Index, which Matthew Schmalz fastidiously prepared. I invite the reader, armed with this arsenal of Sanskrit terminology, to sally forth into the living jungle of texts known as Puranas.

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# I. FROM VEDA AND EPIC TO PURANA AND UPAPURANA

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## 1 The Transparent Text: Puranic Trends in the *Brhaddevata*

*Laurie L. Patton*

### The Question of Transitional Texts

The transition from the religious conceptions expressed in the Vedas, Brahmanas and Upanisads to those expressed in the Puranas of "classical" Hinduism has always been a matter of great delicacy. How is one to account for the theological and ideological fissures among those texts that constellate (either positively or negatively) around the gods of the Vedic sacrifice and those that form around the triad of the more "popular" deities, Visnu, Siva, and Brahma?

On the one hand, the unignorable fact is that certain large-scale transitions do occur over a discernible period. Despite his lingering magnificence, 1 Indra does take a back seat to Siva and Visnu; Sarasvati is transformed from a sacred river to Brahma's wife; and Visnu is elevated from a triple-striding, one-act deity to a major god of colossal proportions. On the other hand, the nature and extent of these transitions are perennially open to debate, and virtually impossible to determine with any degree of certainty. Alf Hiltebeitel writes of the problem as follows:

> A period of consolidation, sometimes identified as one of "Hindu synthesis" "Brahmanic synthesis" or "orthodox synthesis"

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> takes place between the time of the late Vedic *Upanisads* (c. 500 B.C.E.) and the period of Gupta imperial ascendancy (c. 320-467 C.E.). Discussion of this consolidation, however, is initially complicated by a lack of historiographical categories adequate to the task of integrating the diverse textual, inscriptional, and archaeological data of this long formative period. The attempt to cover as much of this span as possible with the name "epic period," because it coincides with the dates that are usually assigned to the formation and completion of the Hindu

> epics (particularly the *Mahabharata*), is misleading, since so much of what transpires can hardly be labeled "epic." On the other hand, attempts to define the period in terms of heterogeneous forces operating upon Hinduism from within (assimilation of local deities and cults, geographical spread) and without (heterodox and foreign challenges) either have failed to register or have misrepresented the implications of the apparent fact that the epics were "works in progress" during the whole period. 2

While the details of periodicization need not detain the present study, Hiltebeitel's discussion of the *Mahabharata* raises two crucial points. First, the concept of a 'transitional period' from Vedic to classical Hinduism, of which the "epic" is the most adequate expression, is problematic. This view assumes that religious history consists of "periods" in which texts were not transitional but more "stable" in nature. From that assumption it follows that these periods were characterized by certain essential traits, which then underwent the process of change. A static perspective of religious history results. According to this schema, the transition period can be valid only if it is flanked by two stable periods; the transitional text can be valid only if there are other more "straightforward" texts before and after it.

Second, Hiltebeitel points out that the transition from Vedic to classical was mediated in a number of different ways, not all of them "epic" in character. To be sure, the *Mahabharata* is one of the most obvious examples of a transitional text, containing Vedic material designated as "narrative" and "story" (*itihasa* and *akhyana*), as well as material found in the Puranas of a later date, all woven around an epic rendition of the famous battle between the Pandavas and the Kauravas. However, one can also take the view that all texts are in some way transitional texts, moving between and interacting with different versions of reality. And, some texts, often characterized as awkwardly eclectic or unmanageably encyclopedic, reflect such





the way toward reading works other than the Epics with an eye toward the interactions between the later Vedic worldview and that which has been deemed the more classically "Hindu" form of thought.

Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty has treated the *Jaiminiya Brahmana* in just such a fashion. The *Jaiminiya Brahmana* moves out of the Vedic sacrificial arena into other realms of human experienceof sex and violence, of human passion and royal intrigue. As she writes,

> It seems possible that the *Jaiminiya*, combining as it does the priestly and the folk traditions, the sacred and the profane, and coming as it does almost precisely half-way between the Vedic and the Epic recensions, provided a kind of stepping stone, a half-way house for the folk tradition to touch down for a moment in the Sanskrit world before leaping back into the vernacular culture that had always sustained it and would continue to do so for many centuries. Indeed, it is equally possible that the *Jaiminiya* author (or authors) did in fact invent many of the particular images and turns of phrase that make the *Jaiminiya* story different from all the others and that these bright moments then fed back into the folk tradition, enriching it in turn. 3

The movement between the folk and the Sanskritic tradition is depicted as a interwoven process of changeso dynamic, in fact, that the distinction between "high" and "low" tradition itself becomes harder and harder to make the more one analyzes a text such as the *Jaiminiya*.

## The *Brhaddevata*: A Case for a Comparative Reading

### *The Date of the Text*

A text that has much in common with the *Jaiminiya*, the *Brhaddevata* may be even more transparently interactive in nature than its *Brahmana* counterpart. Until recently, it has been classed as thoroughly and uncompromisingly Vedic. The core of the *Brhaddevata* is an *anukramani*literally, a "right ordering" but perhaps more intelligibly called an "index." Its eclectic contents are gathered around a core index of Vedic deities. This index enumerates for each





*mantra* (hymn) of the *Rg Veda* the deity that properly "belongs" to that *mantra*. Thus, by implication, the *Brhaddevata* is concerned with the appropriate use of the *mantras* in Vedic ritual. The text also tells a number of *itihasas*, or narratives, to

complete the picture, detailing the circumstances in which that *mantra* was spoken to the deity. In the same Vedic vein, the basic function of the *Brhaddevata*'s narratives is the explanation of *mantra* for ritual purposes. Such stories make *mantras* meaningful and thus render the sacrifice more efficacious. In this aspect, the narratives of the *Brhaddevata* continue the particularly Vedic projects of the *Nirukta* 4 and *Mimamsa*5 texts of asserting the everyday meaningfulness of the Veda.6

Until recently, A. A. Macdonell's edition of the *Brhaddevata* has been treated as the standard text. For Macdonell, it could safely be assumed that the original work was probably composed between the time of the Brahmanas and that of the Sutras. Macdonell wedges the *Brhaddevata* between Yaska's etymological dictionary, the *Nirukta*, dated by Laksman Sarup around 500 B.C.E.,7 and Katyayana's *Sarvanukramani*, which, while possessing much in common with the concise style of the *Srauta Sutra* of the *White Yajur Veda*, still has many Vedic peculiarities that are clearly pre-Paninean. For Macdonell, the *Brhaddevata*, as the *Sarvanukramani*'schief source, must be placed no later than 400 B.C.E.8 Yet Macdonell's work of dating the *Brhaddevata* is complicated by the fact that there are two recensions of the textone longer than the other by about one sixth. In order to account for these two recensions, Macdonell claims that the longer version of the *Brhaddevata* was the original; this original was then later abridged to form a shorter recension.

In 1979, Muneo Tokunaga, in a Harvard dissertation and a subsequent article (1981),9 threw all of Macdonell's editorial principles into question. Tokunaga claims that the nature of the *Brhaddevata* is more complicated than Macdonell assumes. To him, none of Macdonell's arguments proves the antiquity or authenticity of the text. In an intricate philological *tour de force*, Tokunaga posits a series of three scribes who successively interpolated material onto the original "core" text. In his view, this core text was probably Saunaka's *Devatanukramani*, or "Index of Deities"a text no longer extant, but surmised to be similar to the grammarian Saunaka's other *anukramanis* and grammatical treatises on the *Rg Veda*. The two recensions of the *Brhaddevata* mean that the *Devatanukramani* was expanded twice. Thus, Tokunaga hypothesizes that the first expansion of the *Brhaddevata* was the shorter recension, composed





in the early Puranic period between the first and fifth centuries of the common era. He believes that the later, longer versionthe "second" expansionwas probably composed between the seventh and eleventh centuries of the common era. Tokunaga's idea of successive expansions also explains the title of the "*Brhaddevata*"which must originally have been the "*Brhaddevatanukramani*," or the "expanded *Devatanukramani*." From the perspective of dating alone, the *Brhaddevata*'s expansion at the time of the formation of the early Puranas has important consequences for the reading and evaluation of it as an interactive text. While it is impossible to determine definitively whether the author of the text consciously drew on Puranic sources, a comparison with Puranic texts can shed some new light on its rather eclectic nature.

In addition, the *Brhaddevata*'s narratives, explaining the speakers of certain dialogical (*samvada*) hymns of the *Rg Veda*, have been deemed by some to be the source of the work's value. For Macdonell and other scholars of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, the *Brhaddevata* was thought to comprise the earliest extant collection of such explanatory legends. The text could thus shed a good deal of light on the nature of Vedic composition, Vedic interpretation, and the relationships between the Vedic and the Epic genres.

As I have demonstrated elsewhere, 10 much scholarly ink has been spilled on whether the Vedic or the Epic traditions contained the "original" or "prior" collection of narratives.11 Because of this overemphasis upon origins, most studies comparing the *Brhaddevata* with non-Vedic texts have centered upon the Epics, specifically the *Mahabharata*.12 There are obvious similarities in content between the two texts, such as the tales of the *rsis* Lopamudra and Agastya, the birth and exploits of Dirghatamas, the birth of the *rsis* Agastya and Vasistha from a pot, the legend of Pururavas and Urvasi, and others. As a result of this debate over origins,13 however, the potentials for other kinds of comparison between the *Brhaddevata* and non-Vedic texts have been ignored. The Puranas have been eclipsed in a flurry of motivic and text-critical analyses, and it is to these neglected comparisons that the discussion must turn.

The *Brhaddevata* and the Puranas: Parallels and Modifications

It is necessary to begin a comparison between the *Brhaddevata* and the Puranas by a brief mention of the tales that the Puranas

and the *Brhaddevata* have in commonspecifically, the well-known tale of Urvasi and Pururavas and the equally well-known accounts of the births of the sages Angiras, Bhrgu, Atri, and Vasitha. To be sure, since these tales are common in Vedic, Epic, and Puranic texts, the *Brhaddevata* could well be seen as doing nothing more than using famous Vedic antecedents in order to establish itself as an authentically Vedic text. While it is not my purpose to discuss each account in detail, a brief discussion of these stories will reveal that the *Brhaddevata* is in fact doing more than that. As will be shown below, the *Brhaddevata* adds certain emphases to these famous tales that the Brahmanas lack, but that the Epics begin to incorporate, and the Puranas solidify and amplify. Thus, coming as it does in the later period of the formation of the Epic and the beginning period of the formation of the Puranas, the *Brhaddevata* both reflects the changes in emphasis that the Epic makes and anticipates the further elaboration on these changes that are found in the Puranas.

First, the *Brhaddevata* adds a theological component to the tale of Pururavas and Urvasi that the Brahmana version does not emphasize but that the Puranic and later accounts elaborate upon. 14 In the *Satapatha Brahmana* version (11.5.1.1-17), the *apsaras* Urvasi marries Pururavas with the condition that he never appear naked before her. The *gandharvas* come in one night and sneak away two lambs that were tied to her bed, and she cries out that the theft has occurred as if there were no hero or man around to stop it. Pururavas, in response to Urvasi's cry, springs out of bed without thinking. The *gandharvas*, expecting this movement, flash lightning to expose his nakedness. As anticipated, Urvasi disappears and Pururavas wanders until he came to a lake where there are water birds, and he thinks he recognizes Urvasi in that form. The nymphs, also in the form of water birds, appear, and they have a conversation. The *Brahmana* mentions that Urvasi then lies with him for one night, and the *gandharvas* give him a magic fire. Although Pururavas leaves it in the wood, he discovers the next day that it has sprouted up in the form of an *asvattha* tree. The *gandharvas* teach him a special way to kindle and cook rice with this tree's wood, thus initiating him into becoming a gandharva himself.15

The *Brhaddevata* tells the story as follows:

> Now in former times the *apsaras* Urvasi lived with the royal *rsi* Pururavas. And having made a contract together she acted according to *dharma* toward him. And the chastiser of Paka was jealous [*asuyan*] of Pururavas's living together with her,





> his passion like that of Brahma's and his splendor as if he were Indra. He said to the bolt at his side, with the purpose of pushing them apart, "Break up, O Bolt, the affection of these two, as you wish to be dear to me." The bolt, saying, "OK," destroyed their affection with its own *maya*; then without her, the king wandered around as if insane. As he wandered, he saw in a lake what seemed to be the beautiful Urvasi, surrounded by beautiful friends at her side. 16 He said to her "Come back." She said to the king in sorrow, "You cannot obtain me here and now; in heaven you will obtain me again." This conversation between two [figures] connected with an invocation, Yaska thinks is a dialogue but Saunaka [thinks is] a story. That is the (Rg Vedic] *sukta* [beginning] "Hey wife, turn your heart and mind to me. Stay here, dangerous woman, and let us exchange words. If we do not speak out these thoughts of ours they will bring us no joy, even on the most distant day." (*RV* 10.95.1) (*BD* 7.147cd-154)

The *Visnu Purana* adds the gods Mitra and Varuna to the story, explaining the early form of Urvasi through a theological motif:17 Mitra and Varuna produce Agastya, as they are excited by the charms of Urvasi and spill their seed. At the same time, they curse her to descend to earth and live with a mortal. The *Bhagavata Purana*18and the fourteenth-century commentator Sayana, drawing on Puranic and other sources, further theologize the story. As Sayana tells it, Ila the king goes out hunting with the sons of Manu and comes to a place where Uma, the daughter of the mountain, is engaged in love-play with Siva. Because he has intruded upon this scene, he is cursed to become a woman. He pleads with Siva to make him a man again, but Siva defers to Devi, whose judgment is to allow him to be both male and female, six months at a time. When he is female, Budha, the son of Soma, desires her and has a son by her. This son is called "Pururavas," the king of Pratisthana. The rest of the legend follows essentially the same lines as that of the *Brahmana*.

A comparison of the three versions of the tales shows that in the *Brhaddevata* it is Indra who drives the two lovers apart, and not the *gandharva* as told in the *Satapatha Brahmana* version of the tale. The *Brhaddevata* thus makes the story a function of the anger of the god Indra, one of the *Brhaddevata*'s triad of Agni, Indra, Surya.19 The plot of this narrative is motivated by the presence of a lustful god.

So, too, in the accounts that Sayana and the *Visnu Purana* give, the presence of the gods is crucial to the development of the tale. As the *Visnu Purana* states, the gods Mitra and Varuna spill their seed and curse Urvasi to live with a mortal. Sayana adds that the god Siva curses Ila the king to become a woman because he has interrupted the worship of a devotee. Ila in female form becomes the mother of Pururavas, the hero of the tale. Thus, in contrast with the *Brahmana* version of the tale, both the *Brhaddevata* and the Puranas tell an account of divine exploits, where worship of and respect for the deity become crucial to the fate of the central characters of Pururavas and Urvasi. In both the *Brhaddevata* and the Puranas, the theological element is stressed.

The next group of stories that share parallels with the Puranas also occurs in various forms in the Brahmanas as well as in the Puranas. In *Brhaddevata* 5.97-103, the births of Bhrgu, Angiras, and Atri are recounted. Vac in bodily form appears to Ka and Prajapati as they are sacrificing. They become excited and spill semen, scattered into the fire by Vayu, the wind. From the coals (*angaresu)*, Angiras is born; from the flames, Bhrgu is born; and Vac then insists upon having a third son, which she is grantedAtri, the third.

As in the case of Pururavas and Urvasi above, at first glance there is nothing unusual about the *Brhaddevata*'s use of this motif. The *Brahmanas* 20 and other Vedic texts21 also draw upon the motif of the birth of rsis (inspired sages) from fire, and the Puranas and other later works proliferate such references. Manu (1.35) mentions that Bhrgu sprang from the fire. And the *Mahabharata (Adiparvan* 26.05) and *Vayu Purana* (1.4.100) claim that Bhrgu was born from the heart, while the *Bhagavata Purana* (3.12.23) recounts that he was born from the skin of the creator.

However, in the *Brhaddevata* the entire story is told in order to legitimate the family lineage (*gotra*) of the *rsi* Brhaspati, who is claimed to be the descendant of Angiras, and whose sons are considered to be the authors of the sixth *mandala* of the *Rg Veda*. In the *Brahmana* accounts, the *rsis*are usually created along with the donkeys, the antelopes, and others. Yet the *Brhaddevata*, in contrast, is concerned only with the pedigree of the *rsis*themselves. Unlike the *Brahmana* story, the *Brhaddevata* portrays these *rsis*not as partaking in the cosmogony but as luminous authorities in their own right, descending from powerful events and prestigious people.

Similar to the story of the birth of Bhrgu, another *itihasa* from the *Brhaddevata* draws upon the spilling of seed, this time to account for the "pot-born" *rsi*s. Here, the story is even more elab-





orately genealogical and more explicitly concerned with a particular *gotra* than the story of the birth of Bhrgu, Angiras, and Atri: 22

> The son of Prajapati was Marici, and the son of Marici was the sage Kasyapa. He had thirteen divine wives, the daughters of Daksa: Aditi, Diti, Danu, Kala, Danayu, Simhika, Muni, Krodha, Visva, Varistha, Surabhi and Vinata, and Kadru by name; indeed thus [Daksa] gave the daughters to Kasyapa. In them the *asuras*, gods, *gandharvas*, serpents, *raksasas*, birds, *pisacas* and other classes were born. One of them, the goddess Aditi, gave birth to twelve sons, Bhaga, Aryaman, Amsa, Mitra, Varuna, Dhatr and Vidhatr, Vivasvat, of great brilliance, Tvastr, Pusan, Indra, and it is said that the twelfth is Visnu. A pair was born of herMitra-Varuna. These two Adityas, having seen the *apsaras* Urvasi in the sacrificial session, spilled their seed. That [seed] fell into a jar of water that stood overnight. Therefore, at that moment, virile ascetics came into being, the two *rsis*Agastya and Vasistha. When the semen had fallen in various waysin a jar, in water, on the groundthe sage Vasistha, best of *rsi*s,came into being on the ground; Agastya came into being in a jar, and Matsya of great brilliance, in water. Agastya, of great glory, then arose, the measure of a stick [*samya*].Because of being measured with a measure [*mana*], therefore he is here called Manya. Or because the *rsi* was born from a jar [*kumbha*],by a jar also measurement is made.23 By *kumbha* the designation of capacity is indicated. Then, when the waters were taken up, Vasistha was standing on a lotus.24 There all the gods supported the lotus everywhere. Having arisen from the water, he then performed great *tapas* here. His name was born from his qualities; from the root *vas* [is] the expression25 of his excellence . . . Vasistha and the Vasisthans [are] *brahmanas*, in the office26 of Brahman, thus to be given payment in all of the sacrificial rites. Therefore those who even today might be Vasisthans, present at any time, one should honor with fees; this is a *sruti* of the Bhallavins. (*BD* 5.143-59)

As in the previous birth-story, Vedic, Epic and Puranic parallels to the "pot-born" (*kumbhaja*)motif abound. The birth of Agastya is referred to as early as *Rg Veda* 7.33.10-13, the *Nirukta* (5.13-14), and the *Mahabharata*.27 The *Matsya Purana* (61.18-53) tells the entire story in much the same form as the *Brhaddevata* account, and at least seven others Puranas28

refer to this theme.





Yet more importantly for the present purposes, the *Brhaddevata*'s birth story is told in order to claim preeminence for the *gotra* of Vasistha. The tale underscores Vasistha's excellence and claims the primacy of all later Vasisthans in all sacrificial rites. Acting as *brahmana* priests, the Vasisthan's (and, the text implies, even those who are only suspected of being Vasisthans) are the ones who should be given payment and "honored with fees."

This emphasis upon *gotra* suggests a general similarity with both Epic and Puranic texts. In his work *Traditions of the Seven Rsi*s, 29John Mitchiner describes the move from the first Vedic account of the seven *rsi*sto the addition of a second list, prominent in the Epics and expanded in the Puranas. With each further development, the lists of *rsi*sbecome more and more elaborate until, in the Puranic accounts, a group of seven *rsi*sappears for each of the fourteen *manvantaras*, or ages. This elaboration of the Puranas is achieved in part by the manipulation of *gotra*s,or lineages of the *rsi*s.

Without discussing in elaborate detail the history of the innumerable *gotra* lists, suffice it to say that the *gotra* organization itself occurs first in the Srauta Sutras and is based upon the principle of tracing patrilineal descent back to a common *rsi* ancestor. As Mitchiner puts it,

> The Brahmin authors of the *Srauta Sutras* sought to bring the first main list of the Seven *Rsis* more into line with what they regardedand sought to establishas the relative importance of each of the clans claiming descent from one or another of the *Rsis*. The changes thus introduced in the *Srauta Sutra* lists are subsequently in turn reflected in the formulation, in the Epics and the *Puranas*, of the second main lists: such changes being at least partly due to the Brahmin-members of different *gotras* who traced their own descent from a particular *Rsi*, and who desiredand were in a position to demandgreater recognition for their *Rsi* ancestor, thereby indirectly gaining greater recognition for their own social standing.30

As Mitchiner notes, many of the Puranas contain extremely lengthy and detailed accounts of the descendants of the main groups of *rsi*s. The *Visnu* and the *Bhagavata Puranas* name the seven *rsi*s who constitute the list of the second, later group. In many other Puranas the descendants of Bhrgu are listed with those of the other seven *rsi*s, the resulting list of eight being parallel to the eight "mind-born sons of Brahma"a group prominent in the Epics, and whose mythology is developed in many Puranas.





While we are not explicitly concerned with the seven *rsi*s as such, it is important to note that the *Brhaddevata* places great emphasis upon the *rsi*s of the second, later list, found in the Epics and elaborated upon in the Puranas. Angiras is one example; while he is mentioned in the Vedic texts, he is included as a founding *rsi* only in the second list. However, in the *Brhaddevata* he is considered the progenitor of the *rsi* Brhaspati and has his own *gotra*, figuring as a prominent father of those who composed the sixth *mandala*.

Even more strikingly, the *Brhaddevatd*'s story of the birth of Agastya and Vasistha places the *rsi* Marici as the father of Kasyapa. Yet in the earlier list of seven rsis, Kasyapa is not Marici's son but holds a place of prominence on his own. In these earlier lists, Marici is not even mentioned; he appears only in the second main list. Moreover, the *gotra* of the Maricas appears only from the Epics onwards. And Marici, clearly of relatively late importance, comes to be termed the father of Kasyapa in the Epics and in many different Puranas. 31 The *Brhaddevata*, as noted above, reflectsor initiatesthis later, more Puranic pattern.

## The Ideology of the *Brhaddevata*

Up to this point, the Epic and Puranic parallels have gone hand in hand in this comparative study of the *Brhaddevata*. An examination of the above parallels reveals that in its handling of Vedic subject matter, the *Brhaddevata* also includes material more common to both Epic and Puranic texts. Yet it is also useful, and far less commonly done, to make a distinction between the Epic and the Puranic parallels to the *Brhaddevata*. The usefulness of this distinction arises on the level of ideology.

While the narratives of the *Brhaddevata*, the Puranas, and the *Mahabharata* may be similar in content, they are used for different ideological purposes. The short example of the birth-story of the *rsi* Dirghatamas provides a good illustration. The *Brhaddevata (BD* 4.11-16ab) uses the Dirghatamas story in a manner similar to that seen in the birth-stories of Vasistha and Angiras, discussed above. The text tells how Dirghatamas's mother, Mamata, curses the sexual advances of her brother-in-law Brhaspati. She is already with child from her lawful husband, Ucathya, and Brhaspati, overcome with frustration, curses the embryo with, "Let a long darkness (*dirghatamas*) be yours!" The *Brhaddevata* tells the tale to establish the *gotra* of Dirghatamas, whose son is the famous *rsi* Kaksivat. In contrast, the *Mahabharata* tells the same tale to highlight partic-





ularly pious individuals who embody the principle of *dharma*, religious and social duty. In the *Mahabharata*, Ucathya, a Brahmin of virtue, fathers a child on his wife Mamata. When Mamata protests at Brhaspati's violation of her already implanted seed, she shows herself to be a lover of *dharma*. 32 Thus, the *Mahabharata* uses the Dirghatamas story as an occasion to remark upon the bravery of women who protest any interference with dharmic reproduction. Other parallels between the *Mahabharata* and the *Brhaddevata* reveal this same difference in emphasis.33

The *Brhaddevata* possesses an ideological perspective of its ownneither purely Vedic nor purely Epic in style. While the sacrifice remains the focal point in the Vedic perspectives of the *Brahmanas*, and *dharma* remains the focal point for the *Mahabharata*, both sacrifice and *dharma* are relegated to the background in the *Brhaddevata*'s narratives. Instead, Vedic deity and *mantra* come into the foreground. Because in its core form the *Brhaddevata* is an index of Vedic deities, once the text is expanded its focus is naturally upon the relationship between *rsi* and deitynot *dharma* or sacrifice. The *Brhaddevata* thus shares the theological focus of the Puranas.

From an ideological as well as a chronological perspective, then, the *Brhaddevata*'semphasis upon deities suggests comparison with the Puranas as well as the *Brahmanas* or the *Mahabharata*.34 Much of the text can be read with an eye toward the different values and uses of such narratives within the changing landscape of Rg Vedic interpretive tradition during the period of emergence of the first Puranas. More specifically, one can read these narratives with a view toward their portrayal of the relationship between humans and gods.35 Indeed, one might well say that the *Brhaddevata* provides a view into the interaction between Vedic and Puranic perspectives: while its specific theological content remains Vedic, its forms of thought have much in common with Puranic points of view.

## The Powers of Persuasion: *Rsi*s And Gods

The first of these Puranic tendencies is the *Brhaddevata*'sportrayal of the alliances between *rsi*s and gods. These relationships are oddly devotional; they do not fit any of the categories with which one usually thinks about Vedic mythology. Wendy O'Flaherty, in her *Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology*, divides the relationship among gods, men, and demons into three categories, which revolve around three distinct religious activities: Vedic, which revolves around sacrifice; post-Vedic, which revolves around asceticism; and devotional, which revolves around *bhakti*. As she puts it,





> one is referring not to three discrete strata of texts but rather to three attitudes, each one a reaction to the one preceding it and thus "later" in an ideological sense, though not necessarily in a chronological sense. The Vedic period includes the *Rg Veda* and many *Brahmanas* and *Upanisads*, but the Vedic attitude also persists in many parts of the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana*, and the *Puranas*. The post-Vedic stage includes some later *Brahmanas* and *Upanisads*, though it is mainly composed of Epic and Puranic texts, as is the prevalent, "orthodox" attitude. . . . The *bhakti* myths appear in many of these same texts (though not in the *dharmasastras*) and in some *Tantras* as well. 36

While it is not necessary to discuss her theories in elaborate detail, some further discussion is enlightening for the present purposes. O'Flaherty describes these groups as ringing various changes on the relationships described above. In the first, Vedic attitude, gods and demons are opposed to one another, and gods unite with men against the demons. When gods were thought to live on sacrifice provided by devout men, the gods wished men to be virtuous, for then they would continue to offer sacrifices. The demons, on the other hand, wished to weaken the gods; occasionally this action may have accidentally corrupted mankind. Demons would try to kill men unless they were protected by gods who had had their fill of sacrificial offerings.37

In the later attitude, when sacrificial power came into competition with ascetic and meditative power, the tone of narratives was also changed. As Brahmins came to regard themselves as more important to cosmic order than to the gods themselves, the gods became jealous and treated both men and demons as potential threats to their authority. In fact, according to this perspective, ascetic demons were more dangerous than "demonic" demons. The antagonism between gods and men derived from two facts: (1) the belief within ritual tradition that men alone, by performing the sacrifice, could obtain the achievement of their goalswealth, offspring, and so forth; and (2) from the Upanisads, the belief that without participation in ritual, a man could, through his own individual efforts, achieve a kind of immortality equal or superior to the gods. Thus, priests came to mediate between the gods and their twofold challengersmen and demonswho, without the priests, could be destroyed or corrupted by the gods.38

The third attitude, that of *bhakti*, reacted in turn against this antagonism between men and gods. Here, the Vedic concept of de-





pendence upon the gods is reintroduced, and devoted men and demons are protected by the gods, who encourage virtue in both. Against the elitist, establishment view, the *bhakti* texts set the alternative that the priests had previously obscured, that the gods might be willing to make good men or demons into gods. This view eliminates the need for any priests at all, for men and gods are now joined in a mutual dependence that is direct and personal, unlike the Vedic dependence, which relied on priestly mediation. Thus *bhakti* mythology displays an increasingly cynical attitude to the "now logically superfluous but nevertheless persistent figure" of the priest of the demons or the gods. 39

The *Brhaddevata* is a curious combination of all of these attitudes. As mentioned above, the most likely probability is that it existed as the *Devatanukramani*, a core text that indexed the deities for the hymns. As it was expanded or enlarged, becoming the *Brhaddevata*[*nukramani*], various pieces were added on to underscore the validity of the Vedic *mantras*: narratives and pieces of philosophy, which were probably extant in various ways from the Brahmanas and Epic sources, were added to further legitimate the Vedic way of knowing. The general tone of these stories begins with a Brahmana-like perspective characteristic of the second stage; there is some tension between gods and men, usually with the *rsi*s, which needs to be righted-the jealousy of a god, or the attempt by a *rsi* to get help for a gargantuan sacrifice that would make him a rival of the gods. There also remains the underlying Vedic tension between gods and demons; many of the *rsi*s are battered by demons disguised as *rsi*s or demons without disguise (*asuras*).

The Vedic theme of the mutual dependence of men and gods is also present, though recast in a fashion reminiscent of the *bhakti* perspective, whereby the utterance of *mantra*, and not the sacrifice, is almost always the pivotal point of the narrative. There is an important difference, however: the utterers of *mantra*the priestly *rsi*sdo not become superfluous or the objects of cynicism, as they do in *bhakti*. Because the text is concerned with the legitimation of *mantra*, the *Brhaddevata* must show that *mantras* work. Therefore, perhaps at times even inadvertently, the seers of *mantras* become the agents of intervention in equal status to the gods, like those mortal sacrificers who were a potential threat to the gods. Yet, unlike those sacrificers, the seers in the *Brhaddevata* have no punishment or antagonism toward men, but its contrary. The result of the right *mantra* at the right time is a *bhakti*-like harmony between the two parties. Thus, ironically, in an attempt to legitimate Vedic *mantra*, the *Brhaddevata* reverses the usual order of the more orthodox





tale. When the *rsi* becomes powerful, he does not incur the antagonism of and perhaps punishment by the gods, as in the second stage, but achieves friendship or parity with the gods, as in the third stage.

While at first glance, this pattern does not fit neatly into any of the above types of relationship between gods and humans in Indian texts, it is consistent in the light of the portrayal of *rsi*s in certain Puranic stories. First, *rsi*s are far more aligned with the gods than are other humans in the Puranas, often portrayed as allies and as offspring. As mentioned above, in earlier Puranas, the *rsis* are called "mind-born sons" and are seen as the offspring of Brahma. Indeed, they, and not the deity, are primarily responsible for creation. In the *Matsya Purana* (3.30-41), Brahma loses his creative powers of *tapas* (inner ascetic heat) because of his lust for Savitri, and thus his sons, the *rsi*s, carry on the work of creation. In the *Linga Purana* 2.85.12, Brahma is said to be unable to carry on the creation of the three worlds without help and for that reason created his mind-born sons, the *rsi*s. They themselves are called Brahmas (*sapta brahmanah)*. In addition, the Puranas also designate them as Prajapatis, underscoring their function as creators and sustainers of the three worlds.

*The* Rsi *Worshipped by Indra*

Several particular examples from the *Brhaddevata* can illustrate the similarities between the *Brhaddevata*'s and the Puranas' portrayals of the *bhakti-like* alliance between *rsi* and god. Like the origin story of Dirghatamas, discussed above, the following narrative addresses two issues at oncethe power of the seer Grtsamada and the origin of his name. Here, the *Brhaddevata* touches upon the theme of the "being like Indra" and the resulting complications. Elsewhere, I have treated this story as an illustration of Vedic authority, of the power of saying the right Vedic *mantra* at the right time. 40 (The citations in bold are those *mantras* of the *Rg Veda* referred to in the story.) Most importantly for the present purposes, the story provides a good example of how the alliance between a devotee and a god can be established.

> Having yoked himself to *tapas* he, with a body like Indra's, suddenly appeared in the sky and on earth. Now the two terrifyingly powerful Daityas, Dhuni and Cumuri, thinking him to be Indra, fell upon him with weapons. The *rsi*, having recognizing the nature of the two who desired evil, with the *sukta* "Who when born" (*RV* 2.12.1), proclaimed the actions of Indra. When the actions of Indra had been spoken, fright quickly





> entered the two. Now, Indra, saying, "This is the occasion," struck the two down. Having struck them down, Sakra spoke to the *rsi* Grtsamada. "Regard me, friend, in the manner of a loved one, for you have become dear to me. Ask a boon from me; and let your *tapas* be imperishable." Bowing, the seer answered back, "For us, O lord of speakers, let there be safety of our bodies and speech that enlivens the heart. Let there be the possession of heroes and wealth; O Indra we think of you. And you, O Indra, we can become aware of in each birth; my state of mind (*bhava*) has gone to you; don't go away. You are the better charioteer." This boon (*varya*) is explained by the last verse, "O Indra, the best" (*RV* 2.21.6); he chose all this as a boon. When the Lord of Saci, the Swift Conqueror, 41 heard that, he said, "OK," and grabbed [him] by the right hand, and the *rsi*, through his friendship, touched his hand. 42 Thus they went together to the great dwelling of Indra. There the Destroyer of Forts himself honored him [Grtsamada] with love and honored the *rsi* with the prescribed ceremony. Again from friendship the Lord of Bays spoke to him: "Since you, O best of *rsi*s, delight us, praising [*grnan madayase*],therefore you will become Grtsamada, son of Sunahotra." Then with twelve *suktas*, beginning "Hear the call, Indra; do not be neglectful. May we be yours for the giving of treasures. These oblations for wealth increase your strength like flowing rivers" (*RV* 2.11.1), the *rsi* praised Indra. Right when he was praising, there he saw Brahmanaspati. He praised Brahmanaspati with those [verses] in which his sign is apparent. He also praised him with the four following this one. (*BD* 4.66-80)

Grtsamada begins his encounter with the Daityas in a rather risky position. Like Kutsa, who looks exactly like Indra in the *Jaiminiya Brahmana*,43 through Grtsamada's own powerful *tapas* he has attained the status and likeness of a god. He is also like Kutsa insofar as his likeness to Indra gets him into trouble. As Kutsa incurs the wrath of Indra when he attempts to seduce Indra's wife, so too Grtsamada's divine shape prompts the Daityas to mistake him for their enemy Indra and to attempt to kill him. But here, Grtsamada's praise in *mantras* is more powerful than the result of his *tapas*, because Indra, instead of being angry at Grtsamada, comes to rescue him as the result of his praise. The first *mantra* that





Grtsamada speaks, praising the actions of Indra, serves a double functionit instills fear into the demons Dhuni and Cumuri, so that they are immobilized, and it also invokes the god Indra, so that he can strike the final blow. The seer is all the more powerful because the effect of his praise is eternal friendship with Indra. Indra then bestows upon him his nameGrtsamadahonors him in due ceremony, and invites him to dwell with him in his own home.

This kind of alliance has a multitude of parallels in Puranic texts. Certainly, hearing the right words at the right time is behind the larger principle *of phalasruti*, the "fruits of hearing," claimed even by earlier Vedic and Upanisadic texts. Because Indra hears the right words at the right time, he rescues the *rsi* and makes him his companion in heaven. In their *bhakti*-like views on *phalasruti*, the Puranas emphasize the same kind of heavenly camaraderie that the *Brhaddevata* does. Thus, Devaraja the notorious sinner goes to heaven, protected by Siva's retinue, simply because he heard the *Siva Purana* during the hours of his feverish death (*Siva Purana* 1.2.15-40).

More specifically, however, one must remember that the story of Grtsamada is a tale about the fruits of speaking as well as

hearing. Just as Grtsamada is rewarded in particular ways for his well-placed *mantra*, the Puranic stories make quite specific and elaborate claims as to what the rewards of particular words will be. The *Vamana Purana* (15-16), for instance, tells the story of Sukesin, the *raksasa* (demon) who taught so much *dharma* to his fellow demons that their lustre overcame the light of the sun and moon. The sun, in anger, burned the city up, and Sukesin, seeing his city falling, cried "Honor to Siva!" Upon hearing this, Siva caused the sun to fall and rescued the city. After propitiation from his devotes, Siva restored the sun to the sky and took Sukesin with him to heaven. Thus, the worlds of the *Brhaddevata* and the worlds of the earlier Puranas are not so far apart; the right words at the right time gain eternal friendship in heaven with a god.

Moreover, it should be noted that, while in many of the *Brahmanas* the *rsi*s gain heaven primarily through *tapas*, in the Puranas the emphasis is quite different. 44 In the *Aitareya Brahmana* and other Vedic texts, Vasistha and Visvamitra attain the realm of Indra through *tapas*. Yet in the Puranas, heaven is far more frequently attained through the summoning of the presence of that deity on earth, so that the god, being pleased with the *rsi*, appears





before him and grants him a desire. 45 So too in the *Brhaddevata*'s story of Grtsamada, the devotional *mantra* of praise actually replaces Vedic *tapas* as the means of attaining the realm of Indra.

*Seeing through the God*

In the next story, shape-changing Indra, ever hungry for praise, disguises himself in order to "test" the *rsi*. In this story too, the identity of Indra is in question; only this time it is not the seer but the god who is in another form.

> Indra, desiring praise again, having become a partridge, settling himself on the right part of the *rsi*, who was about to set out, uttered a cry. Having recognized him with a *rsi*'s eye as being in the form of a bird, he praised [him] with the following two verses, "With repeated cry, foretelling what will come, he directs [his] voice as a helmsman [directs] a boat. Be ominous of good fortune and may no misfortune happen to you from any side." (*RV* 2.42.1) (*BD* 4.9394)

This small story shows the degree of the god's dependence upon the seer, as well as the seer's dependence upon the god. Unlike the Brahmanas, however, which demonstrate that a god who has not been praised sufficiently may wreak havoc upon the sacrifice and upon the universe, here the problem is neatly solved by the shrewdness of the *rsi*'s eye, which can discern Indra's trick immediately.46 This ability to see through apparent reality is amply attested in the Puranas; *rsi*s are often credited with the ability to see beyond the present into the future and past and to recognize gods in disguise.

*Helping Indra Appear*

Unlike the previous two stories, where the *rsi*'s *mantra* is motivated by fear of the demons or catching onto a trick, this narrative directly connects the power of the *rsi* to his fervent devotion. The *rsi* literally "speaks" the god into existence.

> With the triplet, "I will go here before you with my son; the all-gods follow after me; Indra, if you keep wealth for me, then put forward your strength for me. I offer the beverage of the intoxicating drink first to you; let





> the pressed, delightful Soma be placed first in you; be a friend on my right hand; then we two will kill many enemies. Offer praise to Indra, those who go to war, if he indeed exists. Nema (many a one) says, 'Indeed there is no Indra.' Who has ever seen him? Whom shall we praise?" [*RV* 8.100.1-3] Nema, son of Bhrgu, praised 47 Indra without seeing him. And then Indra [answered] in the couplet, "Here I am; see me, O *rsi*! See me here. I overpower all creatures with my power; the instructors of order strengthen me with their praises; I the shatterer of worlds." [4,5] For Nema, being alone, while praising, had said, "There is no Indra." After hearing that, Indra praised himself with two verses and appeared. The *rsi*, having seen him, was quite pleased, and with the couplet [beginning] "All of these deeds of yours are to be proclaimed for the one who presses [Soma] in the sacrifices," [6,7] he recited various actions and the gift of Indra. [*BD* 6.117-20ab]

Some would simply explain away this *itihasa* by calling it the result of a misunderstanding of two words, *na* and *ima* ("many a one," literally, "not a few"), which are combined in the third verse to make "Nema." Thus one could read the verse

without positing a *rsi* Nema, son of Bhrgu at all.48 Yet if one does posit the *rsi* Nema, as the *Brhaddevata* does, an intriguing story is created in which a *mantra* is used to praise a god without seeing him, either in animal or in human form. What is more, the effect of this unusual praise without seeing is nothing less than the appearance of the god himself. Indra first praises himself and then makes himself known to the *rsi*, who, in a classical exchange of *mantras*, pays for the god's appearance with further praise.

So too the Puranas abound with accounts of devotional prayer and worship that achieve what is elsewhere achieved by *tapas*. As the *Brahmavaivarta Purana* (4.46.45) recounts, when the *rsi*s Gautama and Visvamitra have lost their wives, they regain them by praying to Siva. In the *Agni Purana* (218.1-2), Vasistha becomes a great *yogin* by devotion to the Siva *linga* and recitation of the Vedic Gayatri *mantra*.

*The Vedic Power of Speech Expanded*

The stories above show that in the *Brhaddevata*, the *rsi*s act as eloquent savior-figures, intervening at the right time with the right *mantra*. More examples could be cited from the text: the *rsi*





Medhathiti saves King Asanga from the curse of being a woman and turns her back into a man (*BD* 6.40-41). So too the *rsi* Sobhari saves the sacrifice from being devoured by rats through using the right form of praise (*BD* 6.58-62). In the Puranas this same function of the *rsis* is elaborated. The *Brahma* (13.9-11), the *Linga* (1.63.7173), and the *Skanda Puranas* (7.1.20,42-44) all narrate the story whereby Atri, merely by uttering the words, "May all be well with you," stops the sun from falling from the sky. In a similar manner, Vasistha performs a series of rescuing functions in the *Bhagavata Purana* (9.18-42). Merely by uttering praise to Purusa, the *rsi* both effects a sex change and saves a sacrifice, as Medhathiti and Sobhari do in the *Brhaddevata*:

> Before Manu had children, his lordly priest Vasistha, it is told, performed an oblation to Mitra and Varuna in order to secure offspring for him. Manu's wife Sraddha, who was keeping a milking vow, approaching the *hotr*, prostrated herself and begged for a daughter. When summoned by the *adhvaryu* for the recitation, the *hotr* had her plea so heavily on his mind that he made a mistake in pronouncing the demand-for-the-oblation. Because of the *hotr*'s mistake a girl by the name of Ila was born. When he saw the girl, Manu said to his guru not too cheerfully, "Honored one, how has this ritual of you Brahmins, who are supposed to know the *brahman*, come to be perverted? Ah, woe! There should not have been any distortion of the rite. You know the *mantras*, you have *tapas*, your evil has been burnt awayhow then could a falsifying perversion of the intention of the rite have occurred among you who are like gods?" The blessed great-grandfather had been aware of the *hotr*'s error, and upon hearing Manu's words he replied, 'The distortion of the intention is due to an error by your *hotr*. Nevertheless I shall take measures, under my own power, to ensure that you have good offspring." Thus resolved, the famous priest gave praise to the Purusa, in order to change Ila into a man. The blessed lord Hari was satisfied and gave a boon, and it was because of that boon that Ila became the man Sudyumna. 49

Unlike the more sacrificially circumscribed Brahmanas, in both the *Brhaddevata* and the Puranas, *rsi*s often clean up the messes of everyday religious lifeperforming cures, fixing ceremonies that have erred, and the like.

The *rsi*s work these wonders through speechthe praise and response mechanism illustrated by Vasistha's and Hari's exchange





above. As Mitchiner notes, in the Puranas "the *rsi*s come to be seen as a kind of oracle, an infallible speaker whose speech alone literally carries power and authoritya fiery utterance from a receptacle of fire and *tapas*." 50 In a sense, the *Brhaddevata*'s emphasis upon the *rsi*s' speech, while embedded in the task of the legitimation of Vedic *mantra*, also anticipates the powers of speech that the *rsi*s enjoy in the Puranas.

Moreover, while the Puranas view *mantra* with less reverence than the explicitly Vedic texts such as the *Brhaddevata* do, *mantras* still do function as forms of exchange and honor in the Puranas. The well-known story of the Destruction of Daksa's Sacrifice from the *Karma Purana* (1.14.4-97) provides a good example. When the sage Dadhici notices that King Daksa has gathered all beings except Siva together for a sacrifice, he asks Daksa why he has omitted Siva. The king replies

that "In all the sacrifices there is no share assigned to him, nor are there any *mantras* to be offered to Sankara and his wife!" Dadhici counters that Siva is declared to be the true object of the *mantras*, "That god of a thousand rays who is praised by the *hotr*, *saman*, and *adhvaryu* priests." When Siva hears from his wife that Daksa's sacrifice is nonetheless continuing, the god sends his *gana* (troop), led by their chiefall manner of beaststo the sacrifice. Upon entering, they proclaim, "We are all the servants of Sarva of infinite splendor. We have come out of desire for our shares of the sacrifice. Give us the portions we want! Or else tell us who gave the order that you are to receive the shares and not we, so that we may know who he is!" The story goes on:

> The gods led by Prajapati said to the Lord, "There are no *mantras* prescribing your share of the sacrifice!" And when they heard this, those gods whose minds were obscured by illusion still ignored the lord, so the *mantras* went to their home. Then the Lord Rudra touched the divine sage Dadhici with his hand and, in the company of his wife and his troops, addressed the deities: "You are arrogant with power, refusing as you do the authority of the *mantras*. Because of this I shall humble you and destroy your conceit!"51

And the troops and hordes go on to destroy the sacrifice.

Notice here that it is not the *mantra* that changes but the object of the *mantra*. In a rather *Brhaddevata*-like manner, the sage Dadhici emphasizes that while the *mantra* may have been the same, the sages and gods did not know which deity they were praising! Moreover, the *mantras* have the power, almost like small creatures,





to abandon the gods and "go to their own home." And it is not only the insult of being ignored in the sacrifice, but the ignorance of the *mantras* that is the final accusation hurled against the gods by Siva. Thus, even while the *Purana* is co-opting Vedic imagery and cosmogony for Saivite purposes, the *Brhaddevata* pattern of an alliance between god (Siva) and *rsi* (Dadhici), established over the correct use of the *mantras*, remains the same.

In the Puranas, however, there is one important change in the treatment of *mantra* itself. In these later texts, the *mantra* is usually not quoted but simply mentioned. The mere reference to the *mantra* is what matters. The *mantras* become icons for power, yet the inner mechanisms of their power are not explicated, as they are in the Brahmanas. One could almost trace the movement from the Vedas to the Puranas in terms of the gradual abstraction of *mantra*, where concern for the actual contents of the *mantra* gives way to the attitude that the *mantra* is an attribute of a powerful deity or *rsi*, almost like Visnu's discus or conch shell. In the *Brhaddevata*, the *mantra* is the vehicle of the relationship between deity and *rsi*, whereas in the *Purana*, the *mantra*, while powerful, is one among many vehicles in such a relationship. 52

Triads in the Puranas and the *Brhaddevata*

In addition to its depiction of loving alliances between human and divine, there is one final aspect of the *Brhaddevata* that makes it a curiously Puranic kind of text. The *Brhaddevata* has a pronounced and unmistakable tendency to create triadic conceptions of deities. To be sure, this tendency is nothing new. As Gonda notes, the tendency to distinguish several triads of divine powers, so explicit in the Puranas, is present even in the earliest era of Indian religious thought.53 Both the *Rg Veda* and the *Atharva Veda* describe three groups of eleven gods, who conduct their affairs on earth, heaven, and the remaining part of the world.54 The Brahmanas55 view Agni, Indra, and Surya as superior deities. Most Rg Vedic commentatorial texts maintain that in reality there are three deities only: Agni, Vayu or Indra, and Surya.56 Gonda comments,

> The division into the three classes of the terrestrial Vasus, the aerial Rudra, and the celestial Adityas distinguished by the poets of the *samhitas* as well as the compilers of the *brahmanas* and surviving as the constituent groups of the thirty-three





> gods in epic times, may probably be considered to have eventually paved the way for the constitution of the classical triad of high gods. 57

In addition, the Puranic concept of *trimurtione* god whose nature is manifested in a threefold mannerhas its origins in Vedic

thought.58 As is well known, the Brahmanas' creator god Prajapati, identified with *brahman*, also has a threefold character and is often identified with other gods such as Vayu, Purusa, and Agni.59 It is also well known that in the Upanisads there are several references to the threefold nature of *brahman*as that from which creatures are born, by which they live, and into which, when departing, they enter.60

It must be admitted that, in many ways, the *Brhaddevata* follows these earlier, Vedic texts:

> Some know the sun alone as the one origin and dissolution of all this [universe] moving and still, and of the present, past, and future. Prajapati is the source of this being and nonbeinghe who is the syllable and that which is to be spoken is thus the eternal *brahman*. For he, having made himself threefold, abides in these worlds, making all the gods enter into his rays in the right order. (*BD* 1.61-63)

Moreover, the *Brhaddevata* mirrors the basic Vedic pattern of classifying the deities according to three categories.

Yet there is an important difference. In its adept use of word derivations, the *Brhaddevata* tightens its cosmology into a stricter threefold schema. Some explanation of the process of word derivation is in order at this point. Like the etymological text, the *Nirukta*, which precedes it, the *Brhaddevata* uses word derivations to list the names for a single god, all of these names derived from a particularly characteristic action of the deity in question. To take a simple example, *Brhaddevata* 2.24 describes Agni's name in terms of his essential activities:

> Because he was born at the head [*ag-re*] of creatures, and because he is an initiator [*agra-ni*] at the sacrifice, or because he brings together the body [*angam sam-ni*], he is praised by sages as Agni.

The *Brhaddevata* does not stop at simply listing derivations, however. The text uses these word derivations explicitly to subordi-



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nate other deities' functions to the actions of the deities of the triad. Its emphasis upon the triad is far stricter than that of the *Nirukta* or any of the earlier texts; all Vedic charactersdivine or otherwisefit into the *Brhaddevata*'s threefold schema. The text's treatment of the character of Pururavas is a good example. He is clearly an autonomous figure in the Rg Vedic hymn as well as in later legends. However, in the *Brhaddevata* Pururavas is subordinated to become merely a form of Indra, who "roars" (*ruvan*)in the sky. In contrast, while the *Nirukta* (10.46) gives a similar, and rather humorous, derivation (Pururavas is so called because "he cries too much" [*pururava bahudha roruyate*]), its definition is not in any way related to the threefold cosmology that was introduced earlier in the text. Numerous other examples of this kind of looseness of definition in earlier Vedic texts could be cited. 61 The *Brhaddevata*'s theological meticulousness implies a trend toward a tighter cosmology.

This pattern of thought is parallel to the Puranas' attempts to subordinate all deities to their own triad of very different deitiesSiva, Visnu, and Brahma.62 A story from the *Kurma Purana* provides an illustration. In the heated exchange between the sage Dadhici and Daksa, which we have seen, the more specific question comes up as to whether the Adityas, formerly divine beings in their own right, are to be subordinated to Rudra (Siva) or not:

> [Dadhici said:] "This fiery Rudra, the great god who carries a skull, whose neck is blue, the ruddy Hara, is the blessed Aditya the Sun, that god of a thousand rays who is to be praised by the *saman, adhvaryu* and *hotr* priests! Witness this god who has fashioned the universe, whose form is Rudra, purpose of the three Vedas!" Daksa answered, "These twelve Adityas who have come for their shares of the sacrifice are the only known suns. There is no other sun."63

Like the *Brhaddevata*, the earlier Puranas manipulate theology. In his argument with Daksa, Dadhici attempts to make the Adityas a function of Rudra's brilliance, as the *Brhaddevata* makes Pururavas a function of Indra's roaring in the sky.

It should be noted here as well that the Puranas also use word derivations to do theology, as do the earlier, Vedic texts; the Puranas are continuous with the Vedic purposes in that they describe the essential activity of a deity. For example, the *Kurma Purana* also tells a namederivation story of Rudra, the howler. Brahma scolds the dying Rudra, "Stop your howling!" The story goes on:



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> [Brahma says] "Because of your howling [*rud*]you will be known in the world as Rudra, the howler!" And the grandfather of the world gave him seven other names, along with eight wives, eight immortal sons and eight forms. Bhava, Sarva, Isana, Pasupati, Bhima, Ugra and Mahadeva are his seven names. 64

Again, these name-story examples could be multiplied endlessly. The point here is that, like the *Brhaddevata*, the Puranas highlight the multiplicity of divine names in order to underscore the multitude of divine activities, which are in turn organized under the aegis of one primary deity who is part of a triad.

Moreover, the *Brhaddevata* also provides a stepping stone for the hypostatization of the three gods into parts of one deity, a concept that achieves its full doctrinal expression in the Puranas,65 where the triad of Siva, Visnu, and Brahma is a single, mutually interlocking entity. While the Vedic texts allude to such an interlocking cosmology, they mention it only in the context of a very Vedic concernthat of clarifying confusion about the myriad names of gods used in ritual. For instance, while the *Nirukta* (7.5) mentions that the many diverse gods are "the individual limbs of a single self," its explanation for this interlocking cosmology is based on the idea of ritual praise; the text goes on to explain that, "*rsis* praise objects according to the multiplicities of their original nature, as well as from their universality."

To be sure, in the *Brhaddevata*, typically Vedic ideas about power and ritual praise are echoed:

> Because of their greatness, different names are found [for each]; it (the diversity of names) appears here and there, according to the distinction between [their] abodes. For their power [inheres in the fact] that their names are many. In the *mantras* poets speak of their origin one from another. (*BD* 1.70-71)

However, the *Brhaddevata*'s ideas take on a fuller force as an independent cosmological description. Indeed, praise is virtually subordinated to the larger question of their nature as divinities:

> It is not possible to explain [fully] their coming into being, their power, their abode or their birth; for the whole universe is pervaded by them. For Agni is inherent in Vaisvanara and Vaisvanara is inherent in Agni; Jatavedas is in these two; in





> the same way they are in Jatavedas. The divinity of each of them is from the pervasiveness of their energy, from their sharing one birth and from their sharing one world; yet they appear separately praised. (*BD* 1.96-98)

In the *Vayu Purana* (5.17) the description of a threefold interlocking cosmology is entirely independent from the context of ritual praise: "They exist through each other and uphold each other; they are twin parts of one another; they subsist through one another; they are not for a moment separated; they never abandon one another."

Finally, the *Brhaddevata* places an unusual emphasis on the forms of Vac. In *Brhaddevata* 2.72-84, she is treated as a single, separate goddess with a multitude of forms, as the goddess is in the Puranas. Unlike the *Nirukta*, where goddesses are incorporated into the cosmogony miscellaneously, a few for each sphere, the *Brhaddevata* treats Vac with special status as the fourth, together with the three great gods Agni, Indra/Vayu, and Surya. Like the great gods of the triad, she is the overarching divine category under whom all other deities are subordinated, and she maintains her own celestial, atmospheric, and terrestrial forms (*BD* 2.73). She also has a list of Rg Vedic hymns and names, enumerated according to these forms. Although it uses the vocabulary of Vedic deities, the *Brhaddevata* mirrors the Puranic pattern far more closely than earlier Vedic texts.

## Conclusion

The recent redating of the *Brhaddevata* to the time of the early Puranas is more than suggestive. An actual comparison between the *Brhaddevata* and the Puranas reveals it to be a transparently "interactive" text indeed. Neither Vedic nor Puranic views rule, but both are mixed in a medley of different themes and motifs. While the characters might have remained Vedic, the forms of thought are clearly drifting in a different direction, consonant with Puranic tales. The *rsis* are portrayed as far more independent characters, aiding and abetting the gods of their own accord. Through the strategy of word derivation, the Vedic pantheon becomes more and more tightly consolidated into a tripartite system, accompanied by a single goddess who takes many different forms.

Thus, while the *Brhaddevata* shares with many Indian texts a reluctance to reveal the particulars of its sociohistorical moment, the text does reveal new aspects of the movement between Vedic and





Puranic forms of thought. Like the *Mahabharata*, the *Brhaddevata* too is a "work in progress," echoing the Vedas and anticipating the Puranas. Just as Indra must be recognized by the *rsi* as one whose shape is constantly changing, so too the *Brhaddevata* must be viewed as a "shape-changing" text; its very nature is to shift and mix religious registers.





## 2
## Echoes of the *Mahabharata*: Why is a Parrot the Narrator of the *Bhagavata Purana* and the *Devibhagavata Purana*?

*Wendy Doniger*

When we hear a story that claims to be true, our skepticism often leads us to ask, Where did you hear that story? Who told you that? This impulse is reflected in the tradition of Indian storytelling, too, which requires that its important stories be framed in a line of transmission, a *param-para*, "from one to another," tracing its descent from the original storyteller to the author of the present text. And the choice of that author tells us a great deal about the text's image of itself; the nature of the author is appropriate to the nature of the text. Where we might raise the question of author intentionality, or try to construct a psychobiography, the ancient Hindus tried to place the author of a text in the context of previous authors, in particular, of authors who were characters in earlier works that we would call "mythological." The authors of the two great Sanskrit Epics, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, are actors in their own stories: Vyasa fathers the fathers of the Pandavas and the Kauravas, the two warring families; and Valmiki raises the abandoned children of the hero, Rama. Their personalities tell us much about the character of the two Epics; but that is another story. 1

In this essay, I want to look at the frame, and the author, of a great Sanskrit text closely related to the *Mahabharata*: the





*Bhagavata Purana*. And I want to ask why this text has chosen as its narrator the sage Suka, whose name means "the parrot." The answer to this question will be found by searching, not only within the *Bhagavata Purana* 2 itself, but within the two texts that provide its textual context: the *Mahabharata* (composed a few centuries before the *Bhagavata*),3 which the *Bhagavata* self-consciously quotes and echoes, and the *Devibhagavata Purana*,4 which self-consciously quotes and echoes the *Bhagavata Purana*.

Tracing the saga of Suka from the *Mahabharata* to the *Bhagavata* to the *Devibhagavata* affords us a splendid working example of the process of transformation of traditional texts through what A. K. Ramanujan has called "intertextuality," the way in which Indian texts engage in conversation with one another. For the *Devibhagavata*, which is usually regarded as an Upapurana, was composed several centuries after the *Bhagavata*. One can hardly imagine a more forceful statement of, simultaneously, lineage and deviation, than is made by adding the name of the Goddess (Devi) to the title of the great classic Mahapurana of Krsna-*bhakti*. A play entitled "Queen Lear" would provide but a pale parallel.

### The *Bhagavata*

Let us begin by looking at the beginning of the *Bhagavata Purana* for clues about its purported author. The very first words tell us about him; immediately after the initial verse of invocation and meditation, the text goes on to say: "This *Bhagavata Purana* composed by the great sage . . . is the ripe fruit from the wishing-tree of the Veda, dropped from the mouth of Suka; it is full of the immortal juice; drink it now" (*BP* 1.1.2-3). The claim that an important Hindu text is the fruit of the Vedas (here expressed through the metaphor of the magic tree that produces whatever you wish for) is a common one.5 Where

Vedic scripture, or *sruti*, grounds itself in the claim of divine revelation, which is by nature secret,6 Epic and Puranic tradition (*smrti*) defines itself by the chain of human memory, displaying each link as publicly as possible. The *Bhagavata* in particular goes out of its way to ground itself in the archaic tradition;7 but, as we shall see, it cares more to establish its link with the *Mahabharata* than with the Veda.

The Vedic "wishing-tree" is thus the lineage of the text into the past; the lineage of its transmission into the future begins with the fate of the fruit, "dropped from the mouth of Suka" as a fruit might be dropped by a parrot. And Suka remains the narrator of most of





the Purana. But the situation is confused by the presence of several other narrators, who stand on both sides of Suka, telling about him and being told about by him. From the story in the *Mahabharata*, as we shall see, the transmission clearly passes from Visnu to Narada to Vyasa to Suka, and this is the basic structure of the *Bhagavata* transmission as well.

The first of these supplementary narrators, the god Visnu, is identified by most commentators on this text, including the most famous, Sridhara, as the "great sage" in the second verse. 8 Thus Sridhara's commentary unpacks the verse: "This fruit called the *Bhagavata* [*Purana*]was found on Vaikuntha [the sacred mountain of Visnu] and brought to me [Vyasa] by [the divine sage] Narada. I placed it in the mouth of Suka. And from his mouth that [book] fell on the earth, and by the chain of transmission from pupil to pupil it eventually descended intact."

This verse also implicitly introduces the second narrator, Vyasa. For "me" in Sridhara's gloss must be Vyasa, who thus situates himself within the story (between Narada and Suka). Sridhara, like most editors, places this verse in the mouth of Vyasa, assuming that the entire Purana, including these first verses, is narrated by Vyasa. The phrase "Vyasa said" is inserted at the beginning of chapter 2 and again at the start of chapter 4; "Vyasa said" continues to introduce the text until Suka takes over. Thus Vyasa encompasses the professional bard who is telling about the transmission of the text. Though in chapter 2 Vyasa has not yet been introduced as a narrator, the editor, like Sridhara, simply *assumes* that Vyasa narrates this as he narrates so many Puranas. Thus in addition to playing an important part within the story, Vyasa is also situated on the outermost frame (telling about Narada and Suka). (This ambiguous position is equally characteristic of Vyasa's role in the *Mahabharata*.)

The *Bhagavata* prologue then identifies Vyasa as a storyteller, though not specifically as a narrator of this text. But first it introduces the professional bard, who is always called the "Suta" ("charioteer"). It is significant that *suta* also means "one who has been born," more precisely a male child, which in this context constitutes an extended pun, since Vyasa's bard (Suta) is also his son (*suta*, Suka):

> In the Naimisa Forest, Saunaka and the other sages were holding a sacrifice for a thousand years in order to attain the world of heaven. One day when the sages had performed their morning oblations, they said to the Suta who was seated there,





> "Whatever that best of Veda-knowers, the lord Vyasa, and the other sages know, O Suta, you know all that." (*BP* 1.1.4-8)

And they ask him to tell them about Visnu. Chapter 2 then begins with the insertion, "Vyasa said," and procedes:

> The Suta 9 was pleased with the question of the Brahmins and began like this: "I bow to the silent sage [Suka], the one whom the Island-born [Vyasa] summoned back, when [Suka] was setting forth from home to be a renouncer, though he had not yet received his initiatory thread. Overcome by the sadness of separation, [Vyasa] cried out, 'My son!' and the trees, because they were made of him [i.e., of Suka] who had entered the hearts of all creatures, answered him [Vyasa]." (*BP* 1.2.2)

This is a highly concentrated and obscure verse; Suka is still not named, and Vyasa is referred to only by his place of birth (the island). And though Vyasa is identified as the father of Suka, neither Vyasa nor Suka is associated with the narration of this text. Moreover, how, precisely, do the trees respond? Eric A. Huberman has mused upon this question: "Is it their rustling upon absorbing Suka, or their vast silence? What response, finally, can be given in face of inevitable loss? . . . On

the one hand, there is *viraha*, separation from the father, and on the other hand, there is a suggestion of total union/identification."10 The Sanskrit commentaries, too, offer some help. Sridhara says merely that Suka gave his answer in the form of the trees, but Visvanatha Cakravarty says that the trees' answer was an echo (*pratidhvani*), which Huberman regards as "echoing Vyasa's misapprehension. If Vyasa cries out 'O son,' and the trees respond in the exact same manner, 'O son,' then Suka is indirectly saying, 'If I am the son, who are you? Who is son and who is father?' For, having become one with all beings, he no longer lives by such distinctions." In fact, the verse alludes to a story in the *Mahabharata* that is the key to the role of Suka as the narrator of the *Bhagavata Purana*, a story that incorporates both the idea of nature echoing human grief and the problem of a son who becomes his father's father. We will soon consider that story in detail.

Still within the *Bhagavata*, no further reference is made to the episode of the talking trees; instead, the Suta goes on to clarify the further details of the line of the transmission, now at last identifying Vyasa not only as the father of the narrator Suka but as a narrator in his own right:





> I seek refuge with the guru of sages, the son of Vyasa, who out of his compassion . . . narrated the secret Purana . . . The revered sage [Vyasa] compiled this Purana named the *Bhagavata*, the essence of all the Vedas, and then he caused his own son to receive it. He [Suka] told it to King Pariksit when he was dying beside the Ganges, surrounded by all the sages. While they were listening to it, I came there and listened to it too, by his favor. And I will tell it to you. (*BP* 1.2.3, 1.3.40-44).

This is a most interesting move. It extends the original cluster of transmissions from Vyasa to Suka and then closes it by connecting it with the present narrator, the Suta. But it does far more than this. It inserts the telling of the text within the framework of the *Mahabharata*. Now, the events described in the *Bhagavata Purana* are directly connected with those of the *Mahabharata*; the Purana extracts from the Epic the events that concern Krsna and expands upon them. It thus behooves the Purana to situate itself within the Epic itself, which it accomplishes with the reference to Pariksit. For in the *Mahabharata*, the entire story is told in the course of a snake sacrifice performed by Janamejaya, the son of Pariksit, in order to avenge Pariksit's death; the frame story of the Epic narrates in some detail the conditions leading to that death. 11 But in the Epic, Pariksit dies in just a couple of lines; no one narrates anything to him at all, let alone the entire *Bhagavata Purana*. The *Bhagavata* thus mimics (parrots, one might say) the Epic by projecting its own frame into an episode (the death of Pariksit) immediately adjacent to the episode (Janamejaya's sacrifice) in which the Epic frames itself, expanding that episode to allow for the telling of its own text. There is a further irony in this maneuver. For the one person in the *Mahabharata* who dies as slowly as Pariksit dies in the *Bhagavata* and who, like a long-winded character in an opera, narrates the longest book of the *Mahabharata* (the "Santi Parvan") from his deathbed, is Bhisma, the witness of the entire holocaust. And it is in the course of this narrative that Bhisma tells the story of Vyasa and Suka and the speaking trees, the story alluded to in the second, cryptic verse of the *Bhagavata*.

During the rest of the first book of the *Bhagavata*, the Suta tells the sages the story of Pariksit at some length, with no essential divergences from the *Mahabharata* version. In chapter 7, the Suta says, "Now I will tell you the birth, works, and death of King Pariksit, as it gives rise to the story of Krsna" (*BP* 1.7.12). He then tells how Krsna saved Pariksit at birth.12 But the sages say, "By means of the knowledge that Suka gave him, Pariksit reached the feet of





Visnu. Tell us what was told to Pariksit (by Suka)" (*BP* 1.18.16). The Suta then tells how, when Pariksit was dying of a fatal snake bite, "By chance, the son of Vyasa happened to come there, wandering around with no goal, with no sign to distinguish him, surrounded by women and children, and wearing the garb of a social outcaste" (*BP* 1.19.25). 13 When Pariksit asked Suka to tell him what a dying man needs to know, "The glorious son of Vyasa began to speak to King Pariksit in reply" (*BP* 1.19.40). Suka's reply consists of the rest of the *Bhagavata Purana* (beginning with the second book, which starts here), at the end of which Suka says to the king, "Do you want to hear anything else?" to which Pariksit replies, "No, thank you," and dies, and Suka departs.14

### The *Devibhagavata*

None of this explains why Suka rather than Vyasa is the narrator. The Purana enhances Suka's reputation by insinuating him retrospectively into the frame story of the *Mahabharata*; but nothing in that original frame would lead one to select Suka as

a narrator. This awkwardness is avoided in the *Devibhagavata Purana*, where the Suta, instead of overhearing Suka tell the story to Pariksit (an incident that does not occur at all in that text), overhears Vyasa telling it to Suka. The Suta there says:

> Then when Vyasa had made this surpassingly beautiful Purana [the *Devibhagavata]*, he read it to his noble son, Suka, who was born of the fire-sticks, when he realized that he was devoid of passion. I heard it there from the mouth of Vyasa, and took it in with its meanings, the secret of the Purana, all of it, by the grace of the guru. When he was questioned by his son [*suta!*] who was born of no womb and who had a marvellous mind, Vyasa of the Island told the whole thing, the secret of the Purana, and I heard it there. (*DBP* 1.3.36-38)

The connection with the *Mahabharata* is then made by the *Devibhagavata* in an entirely different way. After telling the story of Vyasa's sadness on being separated from Suka (*DBP* 1.20, a story that we will soon examine in detail), the text states that Vyasa was still so unhappy that he went back to the Ganges to find his mother, Satyavati. At this point we pick up the thread of the first book of the *Mahabharata*: Vyasa learned that his mother had married Santanu, that her son Vicitravirya had died, and that her other son,





Bhisma, had taken a vow never to beget children; Vyasa then engendered Pandu and Dhrtarastra in Vicitravirya's widows. In other words, the text tells us that the other, more famous sons of Vyasathe heroes of the Epicwere born only after (and perhaps to compensate for) the loss of his first son, Suka.

Book 2 of the *Devibhagavata* then retells the rest of the story of the *Mahabharata*, and after a great deal of other material (mostly about the goddess), the final book, book 12, reverts to the Epic frame. There we find King Janamejaya listening to the whole story from Vyasa; there is not a word about Suka:

> Vyasa said, "Thus, O King [Janamejaya], I have told you what you asked, what Visnu told Narada. Anyone who hears this Purana of the Great Goddess [Devi] becomes dear to the Devi. But since you are distressed, knowing the bad way that your father [Pariksit] has gone, lift up your father by performing a sacrifice to the Mother."
>
> The Suta said:
>
> Hearing this, the tiger among kings . . . had Brahmins recite the *Devibhagavata Purana*. And just as he was completing the sacrifice, Narada came there from the sky, sounding his lute. Hastily the king arose when he saw Narada and asked him why he had come there. Narada said, "Today, great king, I saw a great miracle in the world of the gods, and I came here to tell you about it. Your father went a bad way, because of the ripening of his own *karma*. But that very man has now taken on a heavenly form and is praised by the gods and surrounded by celestial nymphs (*apsarases*). Mounting a jeweled chariot, he has gone to the Island of Jewels, because of the fruit of hearing the *Devibhagavata Purana*." Janamejaya rejoiced and thanked Vyasa, and Vyasa departed. (*DBP* 12.13)

Thus the *Devibhagavata* inserts the description of the way that it was told into the very spot occupied by the description of the telling of the *Mahabharata* in the *Mahabharata*: into the interstices of the snake sacrifice performed by Janamejaya to avenge the death of his father, Pariksit. But more than that: the *Devibhagavata* substitutes for the snake sacrifice a sacrifice to the Devi, and indeed it is not that sacrifice at all but the actual telling of the Purana that avengesand, beyond that, savesPariksit. This greatly exalts the Purana, but it also incidentally produces an awkward doubling of the telling of the Purana: the Suta tells us how Vyasa told the Purana to Janamejaya for the sake of Pariksit (as the *Bhagavata*





tells us that the Suta heard Suka tell it to Pariksit himself), but we are also left with the statement that the Suta heard the Purana when Vyasa told it to Suka, for reasons that we will soon examine. In any case, Vyasa, not Suka, is the narrator of the *Devibhagavata*; the Suta recites a long list of the twenty-eight different Vyasas who composed all the Puranas, ending with the *Bhagavata*, before he composed the best of all, the *Devibhagavata* (*DBP* 1.3.1-35).

And the frame of the *Bhagavata* goes on to tell us more about Vyasa's involvement with the text than about Suka's. The Suta, repeating a well-known statement from the *Mahabharata* itself, tells how Vyasa, knowing that people were no longer able to comprehend the Vedas in the present Kali Age, divided the Vedas. But since he knew that women and Sudras and low people could not use the Vedas, he went on to compose the *Mahabharata* (BP 1.4.14). One day, when he was still

worried, the divine sage Narada came to him and, smiling a little, said "Now are you fully satisfied?" (BP 1.4.32). When Vyasa said that he wasn't, Narada told him all about Krsna, and, when Narada left, Vyasa composed the *Bhagavata Purana* for ignorant people (*BP* 1.7.6). He then taught it to his son Suka, who had renounced all passions (BP 1.7.8).

Suka's renunciation raises questions in the mind of Saunaka, the most articulate of the sages in the Naimisa Forest listening to the Suta. He asks the Suta, "Since the sage [Suka] had renounced all passion, for whose sake [or for what cause] did he learn this great big [book]?" (*BP* 1.7.9; cf. also *DBP* 1.4.3: "Suka was formerly famous for being a yogi even in the womb; how then did he study this very long Purana?"). And the Suta replies, "Even sages who delight in the Soul and who have no ties [or no books: two meanings of *nirgrantha*],even they indulge for no reason in devotion to the wide-striding [Visnu] who has such qualities. His mind fascinated by the virtues of Visnu, the venerable one descended from Vyasa [Suka] learned this great story" (BP 1.7.10-11). The *Mahabharata* had already presented Suka as more elitist than Vyasa in the transmission of its own text: "Vyasa taught the *Mahabharata* to his own son Suka and, later, to other students. Narada recited it to the gods, Asita Devala to the Ancestors, and Suka taught it to demigods and demons (*gandharvas*, *yaksas*, and *raksasas*)" (*M* 1.1.63-64) This formula is repeated, with a slight variation, at the end of the *Mahabharata*: "Narada recited it to the gods, and Asita Devala, to the Ancestors. Suka taught it to the *raksasas* and *yaksas*, and Vaisampayana told it to mortals" (*M* 18.5.42).

These are the supernatural creatures with whom Suka generally prefers to hobnob, both in the Epics and in the Puranas. In the





*Mahabharata*, too, Vyasa's other sons are warrior kings who are involved as actors in the central action. In the *Bhagavata Purana*, by contrast, it is Vyasa's intellectual son, the detached Brahmin, who plays a crucial role, though still not one that involves him in any activity other than storytelling.

Vyasa creates his story because of his compassion for and involvement with inadequate humans; the dispassionate Suka learns the story out of love for God, even as the dispassionate God becomes involved in the world out of unmotivated play (*lila*)or, later, out of his compassion for humans.

But Suka's complete detachment and renunciation is what finally qualifies him to narrate the *Bhagavata Purana*. There are, as we have said, episodes in the *Mahabharata* that provide us with information about Suka that explains why he is better suited than Vyasa to narrate the *Bhagavata*. And there are within the *Bhagavata* frame story, beyond that one cryptic verse, clearer allusions to these Epic escapades of Suka.

At the beginning of chapter 4 (introduced, again, by the unjustified phrase, "Vyasa said"), Saunaka asks,

> How was Suka recognized by the city-dwellers when he arrived at the country of the Kurus and Jangalas, as he wandered around in the Elephant City [Hastinapura] like a mad, mute, idiot? Vyasa's son, who is a great and single-minded yogi, appears to be a stupid fool. When the goddesses saw the sage [Vyasa] going along after his son, they were ashamed, even though he was not naked, and they put on their clothes, but they did not do this for his son [Suka, who was naked]. When the sage [Vyasa] saw this and asked them why, they said, "In your mind there is a distinction between men and women, but your son's gaze does not discriminate in that way." (BP 1.4.3-6)

Sridhara adds some details to this brief vignette: the women are water nymphs (*apsarases*),playing in the water, and Suka encounters them when he is going forth to renounce.

Suka's Birth

To understand this episode, which is part of the same story alluded to in the verse about the talking trees, we must consult the long series of passages in the *Mahabharata* (some dozen chapters of the "Moksadharma" section of the "Santi Parvan") that tells the





story of Suka and Vyasa. For the *param-para* of the Purana is from father to son, like the *param-para* of life itself, and the *Mahabharata* explains how the son surpassed the father, even as the *Bhagavata Purana* claims to surpass the text that is its father, the *Mahabharata*. 15

The Epic text begins, appropriately, with Suka's birth (never described in the *Bhagavata Purana*), which is abnormal. Yudhisthira asks: "How was Suka born the son of Vyasa, and how did he achieve his highest success? Tell me. In what woman did Vyasa beget Suka? For I don't know his mother" (*M* 12.310.1). Bhisma replies:

> Once upon a time, on a peak of Meru, Siva was sporting with his terrifying troops, and Parvati was with him. Vyasa was performing fierce acts of asceticism in order to obtain a son, thinking, "Let me have a son who will equal, in his manliness (*virya*), fire, earth, water, wind, and sky." With this intention he asked Siva for a boon. Markandeya told me this story; he was there doing some errand for the gods. Siva was pleased by this asceticism and said, smiling, "You will have a son of just that sort, who will be just like fire, just like wind, just like earth, just like water, and just like skyjust as pure as they are. He will be of that essence, of that intelligence, of that soul, of that recourse. And he will be famous throughout the three worlds."
>
> Having obtained this boon from Siva, (Vyasa) the son of Satyavati took the fire stick and twirled it in order to make a fire. Then the sage Vyasa saw the beautiful nymph named Ghrtaci, and he was deluded by lust. When she had agitated Vyasa's mind with lust, Ghrtaci became a female parrot [*suki*] and approached him. And when he saw that the nymph had taken on another form, though his every limb was pervaded by lust, the sage made a great effort to control himself. But Vyasa was not able to restrain his heart that had gone forth, as he was enchanted by the form of Ghrtaci. And as he strained to control himself, in his desire to make a fire, he shed his seed suddenly right on the fire stick. Calmly the Brahmin sage churned the stick just like that, and Suka was born in it. While the seed [*sukra*] was being churned, Suka of great ascetic power was born, the great yogi whose womb was the fire stick. And as soon as he was born, the Vedas came to dwell in him, as they dwelt in his father. (*M* 12.310.11-29 and 12.311.1-22)





Let us pause to note a few features that will recur in subsequent episodes. Vyasa is worldly; he wants a manly son, and he is vulnerable to nymphs; he is a fire-maker, a hot character, a sacrificer rather than a renouncer. His fire stick (a feminine noun, in Sanskrit, and often used as a metaphor for a mother) receives the seed that he sheds in response to a nymph whose name means "Sacrificial Ladle full of Clarified Butter," a fine metaphor for a womb fit to receive the clarified seed of a great Vedic sage. This conjunction of sacrificial implements, female fire sticks and concave ladles, provides a womb for a child connected with a parrot, even as Siva himself fathers a child (Skanda) born through the intervention of the god of fire himself, Agni, who takes the form of a parrot. 16 And the pun on the name of the child further connects him with Siva: the child, named Suka, is born of Vyasa's seed (*sukra*)even as Sukra, the priest of the demons, is so called because he comes out of Siva's penis (*M* 12.278.1-38).17

Siva knows all about Vyasa's worldly intentions and plays a trick on him; he smiles as he grants his boontwisting it subtly so that Vyasa's son excels in purity rather than in manliness, in detachment rather than in attachment. The trick will eventually become even trickier: Vyasa's son will actually *become* the elements to which Vyasa intends merely to liken him metaphorically. The son is as good as his fatherthe Vedas that his father struggled to divide come to him right awayand he will soon be even better than his father. It is also interesting to note, in passing, that Bhisma takes pains to declare his own source for this storythe sage Markandeya.

When the story of Suka's birth is retold in the *Devibhagavata Purana*, the text clearly borrows its basic structure from the *Mahabharata*, but it also makes several significance innovations. The story is told in response to a casual reference to Suka that prompts the usual question: The sages said, "In what wife of Vyasa was Suka born, and how? You said that Suka was born from no womb, that he was born of fire sticks. There is a lot of doubt about this. Tell us" (*DBP* 1.4.1-2; also 1.10.1-3). The Suta then begins by telling the story of Vyasa and the two sparrows and their child (which we will analyze below), an episode which makes him want to have a son of his own:

> As he was worrying in this way, [Vyasa] the son of Satyavati sighed and became depressed. Then he decided to perform asceticism on a peak of Mount Meru. As he was wondering which god to ask for a boon, Narada came to him by chance, lute in





> hand. . . . Narada advised him to ask Devi for his boon. . . . On a lovely peak of Meru, Vyasa the son of Satyavati

continued to perform his asceticism to obtain a son, muttering a one-syllable seed *mantra* that he had learnt from Narada, meditating on the great Maya [the Power of Illusion incarnate in the Goddess], thinking: "Let me have a son equal in manliness to fire, earth, wind, and space."

When Indra saw that the universe was pervaded with Vyasa's great fiery glory, he became afraid. When Siva asked him why he was afraid, Indra told him about Vyasa, and Siva said, "Parasara's son Vyasa is doing this to get a son. I will go there and give him a son." Then Siva went to the sage and said, "Get up; you will have a fine son. He will be made of all fiery glory, wise, famous, dear to all people always, filled with all the virtues." Hearing this speech, Vyasa bowed to Siva and went back to his own hermitage, and after tormenting himself for many years he became exhausted. He churned the secret fire stick, desiring to make a fire, and as he did it there appeared in his mind the strong desire for a son: "Just as fire arises from the churning that comes from the union of the churning stick and the fire stick, how will happiness arise for me? For I do not have the woman who is known as 'Fire stick for a son,' a young, beautiful woman born of a good family, chaste, a woman clever at bringing forth sons, and dwelling in chastity. But how can I make her my beloved, to be a chain for my two feet? . . . Even Siva is bound to his woman; how then can I become a householder?"

As he was thinking in this way, the beautiful Ghrtaci came within his line of sight as she went through the sky. Seeing that ultimate nymph, his body was pervaded by lust, and he thought, "What shall I do now in this difficulty? If I take possession of this woman, the noble ascetics will all laugh at me. Now, I don't care how much I am blamed, as long as I am completely happy. And the wise say that the householder stage gives happiness, gives a son, gives heaven, and gives release. But surely I won't get that with this heavenly woman. For once in the past I heard a little story from Narada about how King Pururavas fell into the clutches of Urvasi and was overcome by her." (*DBP* 1.4.21-24, 1.4.65, and 1.10.4-20)

In addition to the obvious changes occasioned by making the Goddess the supreme deity (an awkward adjustment, since it is still Siva who grants Vyasa the boon, though perhaps the Goddess may be





regarded as expanding the bit part played by Parvati in the Epic), there are a number of small but significant alterations. Siva no longer changes "manliness" to "purity" in granting the boon, but his statement that the child would be "made of all fiery glory" (*sarvatejomaya*)may reflect and foreshadow the statement that when Suka leaves his body he will be "made of all elements" (*sarvabhutamaya*). The detailed portrayal of Vyasa's ambivalence about becoming a householder will soon be mirrored, with even greater intensity, in the ambivalence of his son Suka. 18

But it is in the relationship with nymphs that this Purana is particularly innovative. Vyasa has already set the scene for his abnormal method of procreation by referring to the ideal wife as a "Fire stick for a son." At this point we expect a nymph to enter, and in fact one does appear, but not Ghrtaci. In response to the statement that Vyasa remembered the story of Urvasi (told, significantly, by the omnipresent Narada), the sages ask the Suta all about Urvasi and Pururavas, and he tells them the story (*DBP* 1.11-13), ending with "Now I have told you the whole story of Urvasi" (*DBP* 1.13.34). This is the only appearance that Urvasi makes in this version of the story; she plays a far more important role in the story of Suka in the *Mahabharata*.

The Suta then resumes the story of Vyasa:

Seeing the dark eyed lady, Vyasa got worried and thought, "What should I do? This divine maiden, this nymph, is not appropriate." Seeing that Vyasa was thinking in this way, the nymph began to fear: "This man will curse me." And so she took the form of a female parrot and flew away in terror. Vyasa was amazed when he saw her in the sky as a bird, but, just from seeing her, lust entered his body, and his heart became agitated. The sage made a great effort to control himself, but he could not restrain his heart that had gone out to Ghrtaci, enchanted by her, because of what was fated to be. As he was churning with a desire to produce fire, suddenly he dropped his seed right on the female fire stick. He didn't notice that it had fallen, and went on churning the fire stick. From that Suka was born, charming with the form of Vyasa. At first Vyasa was amazed to see his son, and wondered, "What is this?" Then he realized that this was the result of the boon of Siva. (*DBP* 1.14.1)

The main contribution of this text is to explain what remains unexplained in the *Mahabharata* version, the fact that the nymph took

the form of a parrot: where in the Epic she becomes a parrot to approach Vyasa, which seems strange, here she does it to get away from Vyasa.

Cherchez la Nymph

Nymphs continue to play an important role in the story of Vyasa and Suka; in particular, the superiority of Suka over Vyasa is demonstrated by the dramatic contrast between Suka's imperviousness to nymphs and Vyasa's perviousness. The next two episodes in the *Mahabharata* version depict this superiority:

> When Vyasa realized that his son was talented in the knowledge of release [*moksa*],he said "Go to Janaka the king of Mithila. He will talk to you about release in all its details. But go by the normal human path, without performing any miracles; don't go by the path of your magic powers, through the air. Go by the straight path, not by the path where you can look for pleasures to which you might become attached. And don't manifest egotism toward the king, who is my sacrificial patron; put yourself in his power and he will dispel your doubts. He knows a lot about *dharma* and about release; whatever my sacrificial patron tells you to do, do it."
>
> As his father commanded, Suka went to Janaka of Mithila. Though he was capable of going through the air, he went on earth, on his own two feet. He went past mountains and rivers . . . He arrived at Mithila and was not tired or hungry or thirsty or hot. He was ushered into three rooms of the palaces; in the third was the harem, like the heavenly garden of Indra. He was surrounded by young women as beautiful as nymphs, with lovely clothes and good hips, good to look at, good at the ways of love, clever at murmuring, dancing, singing, and smiling. They gave him water to wash his feet, and played and laughed and sang to him. But he who had conquered his senses neither rejoiced nor became angry. The women gave him a magnificent bed. Suka washed his feet and said his twilight prayer and lay down and went to sleep properly. Then he got up and washed and meditated, surrounded by the women. And that is how he spent the night in the king's palace.
>
> The next day Janaka received him and taught him about release. Then he went away to the north, to the icy mountains. (*M* 12.312.1-46)





By sending his son to king Janaka for his spiritual education, Vyasa is anchoring himself in the Vedic tradition by doing a very Vedantic thing: he is mimicking the action of several sages in the Upanisads. 19 And by forbidding Suka to fly, he is doing a very Buddhist thing: the early Buddhist scriptures warned the monks not to demonstrate their miraculous powers, particularly not to fly.20 But in this context, Vyasa may have other motives as well; he may be jealous of his son's superior powers, and he may dimly foresee that Suka will finally fly away from him entirely. This possibility is supported by what does happen to Suka on this journey: he is miraculously untouched by his long travels, and he resists the women in the harem (another quasi-Buddhist motif21), who are like the nymphs that his father could not resist.

In the *Devibhagavata*, when Vyasa urges Suka to take a wife and Suka criticizes the householder's life (*DBP* 1.15.1), Vyasa starts to cry, and Suka marvels that even his father, who had divided the Vedas, was deluded by the power of Maya. This is the first of many indications that Suka has more control over his emotions than Vyasa has. Thereupon, here as in the *Mahabharata*, Vyasa sends Suka to Janaka:

> Seeing that his son wanted to go, Vyasa embraced him firmly and said, "Be well, Suka, and live long, my son. But promise me before you go: Say that you will come back to my hermitage and will never again go away anywhere. My son, I am happy when I see your lotus face; but if I do not see you I become very unhappy; you are my very life's breath. When you have seen Janaka and dispelled your doubts, come back here and stay here, happily studying the Vedas." Thus addressed, Suka bowed to his noble father and circumambulated him, and then he moved off as fast as an arrow shot from a bow. (*DBP* 1.17.6-12)

Vyasa here does not forbid Suka literally to fly, but he forbids him to flee in the broader sense. Though Suka departs in dramatic haste, he obeys the unspoken literal command (he walks the whole way, which is described in detail similar to that of the Epic), and he does return, but only to go away forever. First, however, this text further exploits the meeting with the

courtesans:

> The minister brought Suka into a second inner room, with a lovely flowering forest. Beautiful women in the service of the king, skilled at singing and playing, and clever at the science of erotic love [*kamasastra*], were instructed by the minister to



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> serve Suka. The women were overcome by lust when they saw the handsome Suka, who was like a second Kama himself, but realizing that Suka had conquered his senses, they served him, and he, the son of a fire-stick, regarded them with the emotion due to a mother. He went to bed and arose again. (*DBP* 1.17.54)

One wonders whether he regarded them with the emotion due to *his* mother (the fire-stick), but perhaps this is a more general statement of lustlessness. Though Suka remains impervious to pleasure, he is not impervious to a good argument: Janaka persuades him that the Vedas are good (Suka had said it was evil to kill animals) and that it is also good to marry. Suka returns to Vyasa:

> Seeing his son come there, Vyasa was very happy, and embraced him and smelled his head and asked how he was. And Suka stayed in his father's hermitage, at his side, studying the Vedas and all the learned traditions [*sastras*].Then Suka married a girl named Pivari, even though he was still on the path of yoga. In her he begat four sonsKrsna, Gauraprabha, Bhuri, and Devasrutaand a daughter named Kirti, whom he gave in marriage to Anuha. Kirti and Anuha had a son, Brahmadatta, who became a great king. (*DBP* 1.19.42)

This is a truly major innovation: Suka has sons, and even a most worldly grandson! Yet he goes on to renounce them all, thus demonstrating, perhaps even more vividly than in texts in which he never marries, his rejection of all passion.

The rejection of women, more precisely nymphs, is the key to the final series of episodes in the *Mahabharata*:

> One day Narada came to Suka and talked to him about release. When Suka had heard the words of Narada he made a firm resolution: "Sons and wives are a great obstacle to knowledge. I want to reach the highest level. Through yoga, I will abandon this house-corpse; I will become wind and enter the sun. For the sun does not perish like the moon with the gods. (When one enters the moon) he is shaken loose and falls to the earth and enters again upon the wheel of rebirth. The moon constantly wanes and is filled up again. But the sun heats the worlds with its rays and its disk never diminishes. I will go to the sun and live there, discarding this body. I will enter into all the elements in the world." He asked Narada for permission to depart, which Narada granted; and then he went to his father. He



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> bowed to Vyasa and asked him [for permission to do yoga]. Hearing Suka's speech, the great sage was pleased and said to him, "Hello [*bho*],my son! Stay here for a while today, so that I can feast my eyes on you." But Suka, who had no attachments and no affection, who had loosened all his bonds, having set his heart on release, determined to go. And abandoning his father, he went. (*M* 12.318.46-63)

Narada is often instrumental in turning sons into renouncers against the wishes of their more worldly fathers. 22 In the *Devibhagavata*, Suka's desire to renounce the world is not at first attributed to a visit by Narada; it is simply natural to him. But later there is a brief reference to the effects of Narada upon Suka after his return from Janaka:

> After a long time, as a result of the teaching of Narada, he attained the highest knowledge and the highest path of yoga, and installing his son in the kingdom he went to the Badarika hermitage. By means of the seed syllable of Maya, and by the grace of Narada, the knowledge of the highest reality [*brahman*] that gives liberation arose in him. Suka abandoned his connection with his father and meditated on a lovely peak of Kailasa, averse to all connections. (DBP 1.19.43-46)

Suka's Release

In the *Mahabharata*, Narada inspires Suka in a manner that is once again Vedantic: Suka's meditation is a reference to the famous doctrine of the two paths, one to the sun and the other to the moon, in the Upanisads.23 But in addition to merging

with the sun, Suka wishes to go still further and to merge with all the elements in the world. This is a concretized extension of Vyasa's original wish for him: that he be "just like" the five elements. In order to achieve this, Suka then sets out on his final journey:

Climbing a mountain peak, the son of Vyasa sat down in a deserted spot. He engaged in yoga; and he laughed when he saw the sun. Then he left Mount Kailasa and flew to the sky. All the sages were amazed: "Who is this who moves in the intermediate space [*antariksa*], who has achieved success through his asceticism? Body down, head up, he is carried along by his eyes." All the flocks of nymphs, seeing him coming





along suddenly, were flustered and highly amazed, and they stared at him. Then he went to Mount Malaya, the haunt of the nymph Urvasi. She was amazed to see the son of the Brahmin sage and she said, "By serving his father he has achieved the highest success. Devoted to his father, the dear son of his father, how has he separated himself from his father who has no one but him in his heart?" When he heard Urvasi say this, Suka, who knew all about *dharma*, said to the gods, "If my father should follow me, crying out, 'Suka!' then answer him, all of you together. If you love me, promise me this." Hearing Suka's words, the cardinal directions, forests, oceans, rivers, and mountains all together replied to him: "As you command, Brahmin, even so will it be. When the sage speaks, we will all answer."

Then Suka abandoned the four sorts of worlds. He gave up the three strands that compose all matter: 24 the eight forms of darkness, the five forms of energy, and goodness. Free of the strands of matter, dwelling in ultimate reality,25 he was like a blazing fire without any smoke. Showers of meteors fell. Now, there were two divine peaks of Himalaya and Meru very close together, a hundred leagues wide and high, one white and one gold. Going toward the north, Suka saw them and calmly flew into them; immediately the two peaks split into two, an unprecedented marvel. And when everyone saw the mountains split in two they said, "Bravo, bravo!"

Suka then saw the heavenly river Ganges, in which flocks of nymphs were bathing and playing. Though they had no clothes on, they looked upon Suka as one who had emptied his own form (inside). His father, knowing that he had gone forth, was filled with affection for him and went on the highest path, following after him. But Suka went beyond the wind and into the intermediate space, and demonstrating his own supernatural power he became a part of all the elements.

Then Vyasa used his own great yoga, for he had great ascetic power too, and in the blink of an eye he went after Suka. He saw where Suka had split the mountain peak in two, and all the sages praised his son's deeds to him. Then the father cried out, "Suka!" in a long cry, in his own voice, loudly, making the three worlds resound. Suka, who had gone into everything, who was the soul of everything and had everything as his mouth, answered, "Hello!" (*bho*),making the word resound in answer. That one syllable was picked up and echoed by everything in the universe, moving or still. And from that time forth,





even today, Suka causes loud individual sounds to echo on the slopes and caves of mountains. And Suka, invisible, displaying his supernatural power, having abandoned all qualities including sounds, went on the highest path.

Seeing the greatness of his own son, Vyasa sat down on the mountain, thinking about his son. Then a flock of nymphs, playing on the banks of the celestial Ganges, saw the sage and became flustered and, indeed, hysterical; some of them dove into the water, some hid in clumps of grass, and some put on their clothes when they saw the sage. Then the sage realized that his son was free and that he himself was attached, and this made him both pleased and ashamed.

At that moment, Siva came to Vyasa to comfort him as he mourned with grief for his son. Siva said to him, "In the past you chose to have a son who would be, in his manliness, like fire, earth, water, wind, and sky. That is the kind of son that was born to you because of your asceticism. Now he has gone to the highest path that is hard to attain for people who have not conquered their senses. Why do you mourn for him? As long as the mountains stand and the oceans remain, so long will the fame of your son be undying. But I will do you a favor: you will see a shadow [*chaya*]that looks just like your son and that will never go away in this world." Thus Vyasa was reconciled by the

> lord Siva, and when he saw the shadow he was filled with the highest joy.
>
> Thus I have told you, in detail, the birth and the final end of Suka, as you asked. Once upon a time the divine sage Narada told it to me, and so did Vyasa the great yogi, in a series of conversations, line by line. (*M* 12.319.1-29, 320.1-40)

Thus, at the end, the *Mahabharata* establishes a double line of transmission, from Narada *and* from Vyasa, which the *Bhagavata* will condense into a single line: Narada inspired Vyasa to tell the story of Krsna, and Vyasa told it to Suka, who told it to Pariksit and the Suta. But Narada, like Vyasa in the *Mahabharata*, is instrumental not only in the telling of the story but in the action itself: it is he who inspires Suka to renounce the world.

That renunciation takes several overlapping forms, all involving doubles. First, let us note the importance of mountains. Even though Suka has shed his physical form, he is able to act upon matter so effectively that he makes the conjoined peak of two mountains into *two separate* peaks, a violent metaphor for his own separation from his father. And at the end, it is in the mountains that his





auditory echoes lodge, and it is the endurance of mountains that Siva uses as a metaphor for the endurance of the fame of Suka in the absence of his material body. (It is interesting to note that the *Mahabharata* does not single out the trees as the source of the echo that replies to Vyasa's call, as the cryptic verse in the *Bhagavata* does; here it is the entire universe, including trees, that replies).

Next follow the mirror episodes of the encounters with the nymphs, who do not fear Suka but fear his father; this produces in Vyasa an explicit ambivalence, making him "both pleased [that his son was so great] and ashamed [that he himself was not]." Suka then becomes diffused into the world in general, but out of compassion for his father he returns as a double set of doubles: first Suka himself becomes an echo, an auditory double, and then Siva produces a shadow, a visual double. Both of these serve to comfort the one person who is attached to him, his father. It is perhaps ironic that the nymph Urvasi is the one who chides him for abandoning his father, for she herself is notorious in Hindu mythology for having abandoned her own husband and son, 26 a story whose telling is, as we have seen, an explicit factor in the life of Suka and Vyasa as it is told in the *Devibhagavata Purana*.

That text has its own version of Suka's apotheosis, too, still closely based upon the Epic narrative but this time somewhat shorter than the Epic. Again Suka splits the mountain peak in two, though there are no encounters with naked nymphs. Then:

> Vyasa, tormented by separation, crying out "My son, my son," over and over again, came to the mountain peak where Suka had stayed. Then, seeing that Vyasa was so wretched and exhausted, and seeing him crying out, he [Suka] who had gone into all elements, the witness, gave an answering sound. And even today, on the peak of the mountain, an answering sound echoes. Seeing Vyasa crying and destroyed by sorrow, hearing him say, "My son, my son," as he was flooded with the pain of separation, Siva came there to enlighten Vyasa the son of Parasara. He said, "Vyasa, do not sorrow for your son, who is a supreme yogi. He has gone the highest way. You have gotten great fame from your son."27 Vyasa replied, "My sorrow does not go away. What shall I do? My two eyes have not been sated, but still long to look at my son." Siva said, "You will see an enchanting shadow of your son staying by your side. Look at it, tiger among sages, and give up your sorrow." Then Vyasa saw the shadow of his son, and when Siva had given him this boon he vanished. But when Vyasa went back to his own hermitage,





> he still grieved because of his separation from Suka; he was still terribly unhappy. (DBP 1.19.48-60)

In this version, Vyasa merely cries out, "My son," as in the single verse in the *Bhagavata Purana*, instead of calling Suka's name, as in the Epic. The echo is created in a much more straightforward way (there being no encounter with Urvasi or nymphs to set it up), but here it is less effective. Vyasa specifically demands a visual echo as well, and gets it. This, too, is regarded as inadequate in this text, as in other stories: when Saranyu abandons her husband, the sun, and leaves in her place a shadow, Chaya, the surrogate proves unsatisfactory, and the sun goes in search of his true wife. 28 Vyasa then goes on to

beget his *Mahabharata* sons, real sons, to take the place of Suka.

Echoes and Animals

The combined auditory and visual reflections in this final episode are reminiscent of a similar double metamorphosis in a myth told by Ovid:

> Narcissus was born when the River god Cephisus raped the blue nymph Leiriope. The seer Teiresias told Leiriope, "Narcissus will live a long time, as long as he does not know himself." He was so beautiful that many people fell in love with him, but he rejected them all, for he was too proud of his own beauty. One person who fell in love with him was the nymph Echo, who could use her voice only to repeat what someone else said. [This was a punishment for having told long stories to keep Hera's attention while Zeus's mistresses, the mountain nymphs, escaped from her.] When Echo tried to embrace Narcissus he repelled her, and she spent the rest of her life pining for him until only her voice remained.29 Finally, Artemis caused Narcissus to fall in love with his own reflection in a clear spring. Unable to possess the image, he lay gazing helplessly into the pool. Echo stayed beside him and echoed his cries as he plunged a dagger into his breast and died. Out of his blood there grew the narcissus plant.30

In addition to certain familiar motifs, such as the birth from nymphs and the ambiguous prophecy of the fate of the unborn child, there are more important resonances between the two texts. The





conjunction of auditory and visual echoes is the same, and to a certain extent a similar point is made. For the Latin myth demonstrates the devastating reflexivity of perverse *erotic* love; while the Hindu myth, too, clearly denounces the charms of the nymphs and exalts, relatively, the love of a father for a son. Yet even that love is regarded as an all too human weakness, which makes necessary the creation of empty reflections of sound and sight.

In this context, it is interesting to recall another Hindu myth about erotic love, the myth of the destruction of the god of sexual love and desire incarnate, Kama: Siva burnt him to ashes, but this merely released Kama's power into the world, where he continues to pervade all creatures and to exert his power over them even more effectively as the Disembodied One (Ananga). 31 And the animal in which this disembodied god (and his consort, Rati the goddess of sexual pleasure) is carried in the world is the parrot. Thus we may read the story of Suka, in which Siva plays such a similar role, as the mirror image of the story of Kama: it is Suka's freedom from lust that diffuses him into the world, whereas it is Kama's essence of lust that diffuses him into all creatures. Both lust and the rejection of lust are "parrots": they appear only in forms that mimic them. Or perhaps it would be better to say that both lust and the rejection of lust always mimic something else.

The connection between birds and lust, or birds and procreation, is further reflected in the version of the birth of Suka told in the *Devibhagavata Purana*:

> Once upon a time, in his hermitage on the banks of the Sarasvati, Vyasa the son of Satyavati saw two *kalavinka* birds (sparrows), and he was astonished when he saw how lovingly they cared for their newborn child, rubbing his body with their bodies, feeding him, kissing his mouth with great love and great joy. Seeing this marvel of the love (*prema*)of the two sparrows for their child, Vyasa's mind was disturbed, and he conceived a desire in his heart to have a son of his own. (DBP 1.4.4-9)

And it is this that inspires him to perform asceticism for Siva. This episode may have been inspired by the role of the female parrot in the *Mahabharata* version of Suka's birth.

But there is another episode from another Epic that may well resonate in the story of Vyasa and Suka. Vyasa's cry, expressing the grief of separation from someone that he loves, inspire's Suka's answering echo that brings echoes into the world at large. The frame





story told at the very beginning of the *Ramayana* of Valmiki contains a similar tale:

> The sage Valmiki asked the sage Narada, "Is there in the world a man of perfect virtue?" and Narada replied by

> telling Valmiki about Rama. Then Narada departed, and Valmiki went to bathe by a river. There he saw a pair of curlews 32 mating; suddenly a hunter killed the male, and when the hen grieved Valmiki cried out, "Hunter, since you killed one of these birds at the height of its passion, you will not live very long." Then Valmiki realized that he had instinctively uttered this curse in verse, in a meter that he called the *sloka*, because it was uttered in sorrow (*soka*). (*R* 1.1-2)33

And this is the meter in which he begins to tell story of Rama, the *Ramayana*.

The sorrowful separation in Valmiki's vignette is between a sexual couple, as in the Latin myth of Echo and Narcissus, and as in the *Mahabharata*, where Pandu, the father of the Pandavas, kills a sage mating with a wife (they had taken the form of a stag and a doe to do this) and is cursed to die in the embrace of his own wife (*M* 1.109). Within the *Ramayana*, too, this theme is echoed in the separation of Rama and his wife Sita. But the story of Valmiki and the birds also carries overtones of a separation between father and son, as in the story of Suka and Vyasa: for within the Epic that Valmiki will tell in his *slokas*, Rama's father accidentally kills the only son of an old man (mistaking him for an elephant, as Pandu mistakes the sage for a stag), who curses him to be separated from his own son, Rama (*R* 2.57-58). And there is yet another story in the *Ramayana* that connects the language of birds, the interruption of sexuality, and a curse of separation from someone beloved:

> Kaikeyi's father had been granted a boon, which enabled him to understand the speech of animals, but he was warned that he must not tell anyone about it. Once when he overheard what a bird was saying he laughed out loud. His wife, lying in bed with him and thinking that he was laughing at her, demanded to know the reason for his laughter. The king replied that, were he to tell her, he would immediately die [for breaking the condition of the boon]. His wife persisted in her demand, regardless of whether he might live or die. The king then related the incident to the sage who had granted him the boon. The sage cautioned the king against telling, whatever his wife might do.





> Thereupon the king divorced his wife, "and enjoyed himself like Kubera." (This passage is rejected by the critical edition at 2.32, app. 1, 14, 21-54.) 34

Thus Dasaratha's father-in-law hears a bird talking when he is in a sexual situation, and laughs, which exposes the hearer to the danger of death and separates him from his mate; while Valmiki sees a bird who is in a sexual situation and is then killed and separated from his mate, which makes the viewer cry.

And there is another central episode of a person mistaken for an animal in the *Ramayana*. When Ravana plots to capture Sita, he gets the demon Marica to take the form of a marvelous golden deer, with horns studded with jewels and hoofs like emeralds. Though Laksmana sees through the disguise and warns Sita that it is just the demon Marica in disguise, Sita is captivated by the deer and urges Rama to pursue it for her. The deer leads Rama far away from Sita, and, when Rama kills it, the deer assumes its true form as Marica. Rama then realizes that he has been tricked and has thereby lost Sita. Thus, once again, the killing of a human (here, a demon) in animal form causes the hunter to suffer the curse of separation from his sexual partner (*R* 3.41-44).

These stories form a corpus in which we can read the story of Suka and Vyasa: stories in which the emotion of separation from someone beloved is a direct source of the poetic medium in which that separation is expressed. They also form a corpus that links together the themes of mistaking a human for an animal and killing the "animal" (a theme that culminates, in the *Mahabharata*, with the death of Krsna, whom a hunter mistakes for a deer and kills by shooting him accidentally in the sole of his foot), killing someone's son by mistake, interrupting the sexual act (by killing one or both of the partners), understanding the language of animals, and discovering the origin of poetic language. Here we can see the connection between sexual substitution (the animal acting as the surrogate for the human) and the creation of special, indirect forms of speech. If we were to be so foolish as to attempt to construct a logical message given by the corpus as a whole, we would list a chain of theorems: (1) human sexual activity is dangerous; (2) humans have (human) language; (3) some humans become animals when they become sexual; (4) some humans understand the language of animals, particularly when the humans, the animals, or both are involved in sexual situations; (5) sexual activity kills the animals and/or the humans; (6) this combination of sexual activity, animal language, death, and sorrow results in poetry.

The Author as Parrot

In both the story of Suka and the story of the curlews, Narada begins the entire process by telling the story of the avatar of Visnu (Krsna or Rama) and then going away; the story is later transformed into a text when the author is moved by sorrow and/or compassion. The *Ramayana* story of the invention of the s*loka* is reflected in transformation in the *Devibhagavata*, where it is said that the Goddess herself (corresponding to Visnu, the first author of the *Bhagavata*) first composed the *Devibhagavata* in the form of a half-*sloka*, which she gave to Visnu when he was lying on a banyan leaf, in the form of a child: 35

> [Vyasa said,] "Visnu muttered this half *sloka* over and over . . . Visnu said, 'In the Third Age that half-sloka will become expanded.' When Brahma was born of the lotus in Visnu's navel he received [that half-*sloka]*. And he told it to Narada, his son, and then the sage Narada gave it to me, once upon a time, and I made it into this full twelve books." (*DBP* 1.15.49-52, 1.16.29)

This is the story of the expansion of the Purana from a single half-sloka to the full twelve books. But Vyasa is more famous as a condenser than as an expander, and at the end of the *Devibhagavata* another version of the transmission casts him in this more familiar role:

> The Suta said, "The *Devibhagavata* whose essence was a half-*sloka* that came out of the mouth of the Devi, the culmination of the Vedas, was taught to Visnu when he was still dwelling on the leaf of the banyan tree. Then Brahma made it into a work of a hundred million s*lokas*. Putting the essence of that into one place, Vyasa, for the sake of Suka, made it into eighteen thousand s*lokas*, in twelve books. And it was written down as the Purana named the *Devibhagavata*. But even today, in the world of the gods, the longer version still exists." (*DBP* 12.14.1-4)

Instead of expanding the Purana from a half-*sloka* to twelve books, Vyasa now reduces it from the newly postulated intermediate stage of a hundred million s*lokas* to the mere eighteen thousand that we have in the extant twelve books. In the *Bhagavata Purana*, as we have noted, the sages wonder why a dispassionate sage like





Suka bothered to learn such a big book. Perhaps this is why Vyasa condensed it: because the dispassionate Suka has no time for a really long book. In the *Mahabharata*, it was the shortcomings of men during the Kali Age that justified the condensation; in this passage of the *Devibhagavata* the text is condensed because the listener is too good (too great a yogi), not too bad, to read a long book.

Indeed, there is another episode in the *Devibhagavata* that turns on its head the problem of Suka's interest in any *Purana*. Vyasa's first attempt to dissuade Suka from renouncing takes a most interesting tack: "Vyasa, seeing that Suka wanted to become a renouncer, said to him, 'My son, read this *Bhagavata Purana* that I have made. It is beautiful and not too long, a Purana that is the equal of the Veda'" (*DBP* 1.15.47). Vyasa then tells Suka the story of the origin of the Purana from the half-*sloka* given by the Goddess, whereupon the Suta remarks, "Thus he spoke, and he told it to his son and to me, and I grasped the whole Purana, though it was very long. Suka studied the Purana and remained in the lovely *asrama* of Vyasa, but he did not find peace there" (*DBP* 1.16.39). Vyasa hopes to use the Purana to enchant Suka into remaining with him; his plan fails, however, perhaps because his statement that the Purana is "not too long" is merely wishful thinking: though he apparently tries to reduce it for the sake of Suka's limited attention span for things worldly, the Suta still thinks it is very long, and perhaps Suka thought it was too long.

In the *Bhagavata*, as in the *Mahabharata*, manifestations of Siva frame the Vaisnava avatar: Siva grants Vyasa the son in the first place and sets the stage for his disappearance; and he returns in the end to grant Vyasa the shadow of his vanished son. Siva is also present as an echo in the parrot that suggests the stories of Siva and Kama and Siva/Agni and Skanda. The appropriateness of a parrot to tell the story of Krsna may also be supported by yet another Upanisadic image, the image of the two birds, one of whom eats the fruit while the other does not; 36 one bird is said to be dark blue, like Krsna, and the other green with red eyes, surely a parrot.37 This parrot (doubled in the pair of sparrows) is to Vyasa's poetry what the curlews are to Valmiki's poetry: the curlews give Valmiki his sweet sound of sorrow, and the parrot (and sparrows) provide Vyasa with a disciple who can "echo" his work in the presence of the dying king.38 The parrot and the echo in the cave together provide a brilliant paradigm for the Purana that is an echo of the Epic. Yet we must not forget that the Purana (anachronisticly, we would say) regards itself as the original, of which the Epic is but an echo.

Vyasa is fertile in body as well as in mind; he is receptive to any number of nymphs besides Ghrtaci and produces a significant percentage of the cast of characters in any drama that he narrates. Suka is sterile in body; indeed, he deconstructs his body altogether. But his purity of spirit is entirely appropriate to the spiritual burden of the *Bhagavata*. Moreover, by becoming disembodied, Suka *disperses* himself into all creatures pervasively, just like Kama, the god of lust that he rejects. This is a fine metaphor for the process of proselytization. This need to proselytize is characteristic, not of a martial Epic like the *Mahabharata*, but of a work of devotion and renunciation like the *Bhagavata Purana*.

A propos of this story of Suka and Vyasa, P. C. Roy, the translator/publisher of the *Mahabharata*, observed (and Sorensen says that he "rightly remarks" 39): "It is evident from this that the Suka who recited the *Srimad Bhagavata* to Pariksit, the grandson of Yudhisthira, could not possibly be the Suka who was Vyasa's son. Orthodoxy would be staggered at this; the prevailing impression is that it was Vyasa's son Suka who recited the *Bhagavata* to Pariksit."40 The logic behind this argument seems to be that since Suka no longer existed on earth, he could not have lived to talk to Pariksit. This need not be so, however; Suka could certainly have told the *Bhagavata* to Pariksit *before* his final departure from earth.

But in any case it is madness to argue with such flat-footed logic about the number of nymphs dancing on the head of this mythical transmission. How could the *Mahabharata* tell us when Suka narrated the *Bhagavata* to Pariksit, when the *Bhagavata* was not to be composed for another millennium? More to the point, surely a sage who was born through the combined forces of a female parrot named Sacrificial Ladle, an uncontrolled meditating sage, and a fire-stick, a sage who becomes an echo and a shadow, who is diffused throughout the universe, and who, finally, metaphysically surpasses his father, the author of the great Epic, *must* be the narrator of the *Bhagavata Purana*.





# 3
# The Scrapbook of Undeserved Salvation: The *Kedara Khanda* of the *Skanda Purana*

*Wendy Doniger*

## The Scrap Purana

Western Indologists often assume that the Puranas were made, like camels in the old joke, by a noncommunicating committee, or that, like the elephants in another old joke, they continued to be perceived blindly by different members of the tradition as a composite of several distinct, noncommunicating sorts of texts, to which anyone was entitled to add a snake here (the trunk, a hymn of praise), a rope there (the tail, a local folktale), and so forth. And indeed there is some truth in this, as in most wrong ideas. Certainly the authors of the Puranas did not share our respect for the integrity of an inherited written script. For one thing, they worked as often from oral as from written texts, and, for another, their tradition was one that encouraged improvisation. 1

In this world of ever-shifting Puranic sands, the *Skanda Purana* is surely the shiftiest, or perhaps the sandiest, of all. The longest and most sprawling of all the Puranas, though it was usually grouped with the Maha- rather than the Upapuranas it was regarded even by the native Indian tradition as a "scrap-bag;" its name forms a pun to this effect in Tamil, where it is the "scrap" Purana (*Kantal-Puranam)*. Its open-endedness has proved most useful to Indian authors through the ages; whenever a Pauranika





came upon a story that seemed to be, or ought to be, old, but did not seem to have any known provenance, he could remark, without fear of contradiction, "It's in the *Skanda Purana*," just as family members assure one another, when looking for a

misplaced object, "It's probably in that old closet in the attic." Many a naive Indologist (myself included) has wasted days searching in the extant editions of the *Skanda Purana* for stories said to be there, but not there now. I got my own back once, however, by resorting to this ploy myself when, having misplaced the source of a quotation that I distinctly remembered copying out of some now irretrievable Puranic text, I finally decided to use it anyway and to attribute it to the *Skanda Purana*. 2

Certainly, different parts of the *Skanda Purana* were added at different periods (even the formidable Ludo Rocher despairs of dating this text3), and divergent traditions, composed in increments over several centuries, were brought together in the present redactions. The text often betrays its checkered past, despite its constant attempts to integrate each new view. But this is its strength, not its weakness. The *Skanda Purana* is, in a very real sense, a *living* Purana, one of the few living Puranas still extant in Sanskrit, and certainly one of the most popular.4 Why has it survived where other Puranas have become literary dinosaurs? Clearly, it has served someone's purposes, perhaps even several conflicting purposes. On the one hand, it has proved a means whereby the Sanskrit tradition could encompass rival traditions, could "kill by embracing" as the saying goes. Or, to look at it from the other standpoint, it has been a door through which the local, vernacular Puranas could enter into the *soi-distant* mainstream tradition. It has enabled the vernacular tradition to legitimate itself by claiming to be a part of an infinitely expansible Sanskrit text.

It has been noted that the *Bhagavata Purana* represents a revolution in Puranas, establishing *bhakti* over ritualism as a means to salvation. And I have argued elsewhere in this volume that, within the post-revolutionary *bhakti parampara* of Krsna worship, the *Bhagavata* made a successful claim to have encompassed the *Mahabharata*, with Suka surpassing Vyasa (author of the *Mahabharata*) as the author first of the *Bhagavata* and then of the further-encompassing *Devibhagavata*. But V. Narayana Rao has shown us ways in which the *Bhagavata* is, in turn, rejected in Telugu epics by those who no longer share its ideology.5 Here I wish to argue that the *Skanda Purana*, like the Telugu tradition, goes one step further than the *Bhagavata* and surpasses *bhakti* itself. In this, the *Skanda* is a counterrevolutionary text, which undoes *bhakti* (or





deconstructs it, to use the trendy word) by reabsorbing the *sthalapurana* traditions into the conservative ritualist tradition of the *Mahabharata*, or, if you prefer, revalidates Epic ritualism through a consistent reformulation of traditional Puranic myths. It also introduces into many traditional myths a cynical and feminist point of view that is, in its own quiet way, subversive.

Pauranikas and Indologists

We must not, therefore, follow most Sanskritists in regarding the *Skanda Purana* as not only authorless (as Michel Foucault tells us all texts are) but mindless (like Paul Griffith's Buddhists). The scraps were not thrown into the scrap bag without any consideration of their relevance to what was already in the bag. The divergent traditions were synthesized and arranged in a new plan devised by the compiler of this one text. 6

We generally believe, and not without reason, that the mission of Indologists is rather different from the mission of the authors of the texts that they study. Indologists comb through the texts of ancient India in search of pieces of a new puzzle that they hope to construct (and, perhaps, to solve) from the fragments of the rather different, often insoluble, puzzles posed by the texts themselves. And so we go about, snipping a few pieces from the *Rg Veda*, a few from the *Mahabharata*, and so forth, in order to produce our new Purana, our own monograph on "Horses in Ancient India" or, more narrowly, "Evidence for the Use of the Stirrup in Ancient India." Naturally, our agendas are different from theirs; most basically, of course, they were usually composing texts related to worship, while we compose texts related to academic tenure or the narcissism of publication. But there are also a number of less obvious, more intellectual agendas that we as Indologists may very well share with the authors of the texts that we study.

The "Kedara Khanda"

In particular, the redactor of the "Kedara Khanda" (the first book of the first section, the "Mahesvara Khanda," of the *Skanda Purana*) seems to me to have had an agenda very like that of many Indologists.7 That is, he sifted through the texts of his own tradition and selected those myths that seemed to him to have certain themes

in common. And then, in retelling them, he added bits and pieces of his own interpretation to make their inherent correspondences more blatantly apparent and, in some cases, to use them in entirely new ways. This process could well stand as a mirror for the academic discipline of Indology. True, the author's plan is colored by a devotional agendahe is setting out to magnify his god, Sivabut there, too, I wonder how far he is from the spirit of those anthropologists who regard the people among whom they do their fieldwork as "their" tribe.

Other Puranas, of course, have unifying themes, though these are often of a more traditional character. For instance, many Puranas weave their stories around the central theme of the place in which they were composed: all the great events of the mythical past are said to have taken place *here*. 8 Or there may be a theme of pilgrimage: as the author moves through a sacred geography, he tells us what happened in each special place along the way.9 Or there may be a genealogy: stories are told about each of the ancestors in a long line.10 Or, finally, there may be episodes in the biography of a single god. This last technique works best for gods who have quasi-human lives, like Krsna, but it is also done for other gods, including Visnu and Siva, whose life-cycles, however supernatural, nevertheless touch down at many of the human rites of passage (birth, marriage, the occasional adultery, and, in some texts, even a kind of temporary death).

What is unusual about the first book of the *Skanda Purana* is that it seems to organize its stories about abstract themes, rather than a concrete person or a place; it has an intellectual agenda. The principle of organization is neither spatial (geographic) nor temporal (the lifestory narrative), but thematic. One might have expected, from the title, some kind of geographical focus upon the temple of Kedaranatha in the Himalayas, said to be "the highest . . . and coldest of the holy places."11 But this is not the case; the scope of the text, both in its sources and in its claims, is pan-Indian and often Vedic. Thus, instead of producing yet another local, self-aggrandizing *sthalapurana*, this text does what we always thought only Indologists did: it looks at its own mythological tradition, selects from it, rearranges it, and restructures it into a thematic essay.12

It does this in two ways: it winds a set of old stories together into a new text, adding just enough to each story to make its point, and it adds new stories that are not found elsewhere. The text puts a particular spin on each tale that it retells, and that spin, picking up the impetus already present within the older story, like a good judo





player, throws the separate stories together into an orchestrated constellation of new movement. The new stories add up to make a statement that will go on to be echoed in many vernacular texts: the grace granted to the "accidental devotee" or "immoral or undeserving devotee" through the worship of the *linga*, the erect penis of the god Siva. And the old stories are retold in a satirical and quasi-feminist vein. Both of these new projects involve major reversals of conventional moral expectations, positioning marginal figures (sinners, women) at the center of the grace of God. Let us consider the two projects one by one.

## The Undeserving Devotee of the Linga

The theme of the "undeserving devotee" or "accidental devotee" is not unique to the "Kedara Khanda." It appears in the *Padma Purana* 13and in the appended prologue to the *Siva Purana*, in the story of Devaraja.14 (Indeed, the Devaraja story is a bit more self-referential: it is by hearing the *Siva Purana*, accidentally and without paying any attention to it, that Devaraja is saved from the consequences of his sins). And it is common in non-Sanskritic texts, particularly in South India. But where most of the other texts tell just one story, often as a kind of extreme *phalasruti* (advertisement for the benefits of reading/hearing the work in question), the "Kedara Khanda" tells a number of interrelated stories of this genre and even uses it as a kind of armature on which to build the text as a whole.

The theme of the undeserving devotee implicitly repositions ritualism, apparently "mindless" ritualism, over *bhakti*. It argues that feelings, emotions, intentions, do not count at all; that certain actions are efficacious in themselves in procuring salvation for the unwitting devotee. In this it mirrors another sort of *bhakti*, one that is, significantly, characteristic of the Saiva Siddhanta of South India: the *bhakti* of the kitten, who goes limp to let God the mother cat pick him up by the scruff of the neck, in contrast with the *bhakti* of the baby monkey, who holds on tight to God the mother monkey.

But the accidental devotion of the "Kedara Khanda" is far from a return to Vedic ritualism. For knowledge (an essential criterion of Vedic ritualism) does not count any more than emotion, in this line of argument; you don't even have to know how to do the ritual, but you do it "naturally," almost like the natural (*sahaja*)acts of Tantric ritual. In this sense, at least, this is a Tantric argument for the efficacy of a text useful for sinners in the Kali Age.15

The particular inflection of this motif that is presented in the "Kedara Khanda," the theme of "great sinners who were saved from





hell by an accidental act of *linga* worship," incorporates (and reverses) an old story, told elsewhere, not of a sinner, but of a *good* man, a devotee of Siva, who is saved from death (Yama or Kala) by Siva in the form of Yamantaka ("the ender of Yama") or Kalantaka ("the ender of Kala"). The *Bhagavata Purana* calls him "Markandeya," and depicts him worshipping the *linga*, from which Siva emerges, as he does in the classical story of Brahma and Visnu and the flame-*linga*. 16 Other Puranas call him Sveta and depict him, too, as worshipping the *linga*, from which Siva emerges to destroy Kala.17 In yet other texts, however, Sveta is not worshipping the *linga* at the critical moment, though he is still rescued by Siva,18 and this is also true of the "Kedara Khanda" version:

> King Sveta was, from birth, a virtuous king and a devotee of Siva; he told the truth and ruled with *dharma*, and everyone in his kingdom was happy. No one grieved for the death of a son, and there was no disrespect and no murder, nor any poverty. Yama and Kala (here regarded as the master of Yama) came to take him one day when he was worshipping Siva. Then Siva, the Destroyer of Kala, saw Kala, and he looked at Kala with his third eye and burnt him to ashes in order to protect his devotee. Sveta awoke from his meditation to see Kala burnt in front of him. He praised Siva and asked him what had happened, and Siva told him, "Kala eats all creatures, and he came here to eat you in my presence and so I burnt him. You and I will kill evil men who violate *dharma*, heretics who wish to destroy people." But Sveta said, "This world behaves properly because of Kala, who protects and creates by destroying creatures. If you are devoted to creation, you should revive Kala, for without him there will be nothing." Siva did as his devotee suggested; he laughed and revived Kala with the form he had had. Then Kala praised Siva the Destroyer of Kala, he who made Kama disembodied and destroyed the sacrifice of Daksa, and who pervades the universe with the form of the *linga*. And Kala told his messengers, "The devotees of Siva, with their matted hair and rosaries and Saiva names, wear the garb of Siva. Even if they are parasites who terrify people, even if they are evil and do bad things, you must not bring them to my world" (32.4-96)

Despite its general advocacy of *linga* worship, the "Kedara Khanda" does not specify what sort of worship Sveta is engaged in at the moment when death comes for him. Instead, this text assimilates the killing of Yama to the burning and revival of Kama, which it has





just narrated ("Kedara Khanda" 21.68-126; see below). This not a tale of grace given to a sinner. On the contrary, it shares the old *bhakti* assumption (itself based upon the older Vedic assumption) that if you love God and serve him he will love you and serve you. 19 But within the text we can note a crucial shift in the attitude to the virtue, or lack of it, of the devotee who is to be saved. At first, the criterion (which Sveta embodies) is a combination of virtue and *Siva-bhakti*. Midway, however, the criterion shifts to virtue, with no reference to sectarian orientation, when Siva proposes that, usurping the task of the now-defunct god of the dead, he and Sveta should punish evildoers and heretics (even, supposedly, evildoers who are also Siva worshippers). But in the end Kala exempts from death all Siva worshippers, *even if they are evildoers* (and, indeed, evil-thinkers: even heretics and liars go to heaven if they worship Siva [5.101]). Thus, the paradigmatic story of virtue rewarded is subtly twisted into a tale of (possibly virtueless) devotion rewarded.

The paradigm of the good *bhakta*, already shadowed by the possibility of the evil *bhakta* in the story of Sveta, is then transformed, in other episodes, into the paradigm of the evil man who is not even consciously a *bhakta*:

> A thief, who killed Brahmins, drank wine, stole gold, and corrupted other men's wives, lost everything in a game of dice. That night, he climbed on the head of a Siva-*linga* and took away the bell [inadvertently ringing it]. At that moment, Siva sent his servants from Kailasa to that temple. When the thief saw them, he wanted to run away from the head of the *linga*, but Virabhadra said, "You fool, what are you afraid of? Siva is pleased with you today." And they put him in the heavenly car and brought him to Kailasa and made him a servant of Siva. (8.1-13).

The thief himself is unaware of the theological twist that makes him, as Siva tells his servants, "the best of all my devotees" (8.8). But the god saves him despite himself.

Three variants on this theme are collected together in a single chapter of the "Kedara Khanda." The first story in the series is the tale of Indrasena:

> Indrasena was a king who was crazy about hunting, a cruel man who nourished his own life's breaths by the life's breaths of others. He was a thief and an adulterer, a drunkard and Brahminicide, seducer of his guru's wife. When he died, Yama's





> messengers bound him and brought him to Yama, but then Yama rose, bowed his head to Siva, reviled his own messengers, and set Indrasena free from his bonds. He promised to send him to glorious worlds, saying, "For you are a great devotee of Siva." Indrasena said, "I don't know Siva. I've always been addicted to hunting." Then Yama said, "You always used to say (when hunting), 'Get that! [*ahara*]. Strike him! [*praharasva*]' [phrases containing Hara, the name of Siva]. And by the ripening of that *karma* you have been purified." Then Yama's messengers took Indrasena to Siva, who embraced him and made him his servant, named Canda. (5.64-85)

Directly after this story we are told another brief vignette of accidental grace:

> An evil thief was killed by the king's men. A dog came to eat him, and accidentally, unconsciously [*caitanyena vina*], the dog's nails made the mark of Siva's trident on the man's forehead. As a result, Rudra's messengers took him to Kailasa. (5.92-95)

The bard then tells another, longer story:

> A Kirata [a mountaineer and hunter, regarded as a member of an Untouchable caste], addicted to hunting, devoid of discrimination, harming living creatures, one day came upon a *linga* in the forest when he was parched with thirst. He worshipped the *linga* by spitting cheekfuls of water onto it and placing the flesh of wild animals on it with his left hand, and vowed to devote himself to heaven from that day forth. He, too, was translated to heaven, even before his death. There he took on the same form as Siva, and the Goddess laughed and said, "He is certainly just like you, with your own form and movement and laughable qualities. But you are the only one that I serve." When the Kirata heard what the Goddess said, he immediately turned away his face, while Siva was watching, and said, "Forgive me, Siva, and make me your doorkeeper." And Siva did. (5.111-97)

This story makes a new point: the Kirata is not unconscious of his act of worship, but he is unconscious of the normal rules of worship. The gifts that he offers are hideously unclean from the traditional point of view, but Siva accepts them in the spirit in which they are





offered. The character of the Kirata resonates with one of the earliest and most famous myths of Siva, the *Mahabharata* story of the combat between Arjuna and Siva, when Siva took the form of a Kirata, vanquished Arjuna, and then revealed himself and gave Arjuna the magic weapons that he sought. 20 This identification alerts us to one of the implications of the theme of accidental devotion: that, since the god himself is an outsider, violent and iconoclastic, he is partial to worshippers who are, as the Goddess mockingly remarks, like him.

The laughter of the Goddess at Siva's expense is a theme that we will encounter often in this text; here she mocks the traditional translation of the devotee into the image of Siva and implies, perhaps, that this identity might bring about an inappropriate intimacy between her and the devotee.21 Blushing at this implication, the Kirata volunteers to *prevent* others from becoming too intimate with her (or Siva) by guarding the door. This is a theme closely connected with incest; it is Ganesa, in particular, who is given the task of guarding the door to protect the Goddess from Siva and who is punished by Siva for his intimacy with the Goddess.22 A brief version of this episode is alluded to elsewhere in our text:

> Ganesa was born of Nature [*prakrti*, the Goddess] and looked exactly like Siva, with the very same form. A battle took place between him and Siva, because, being born of Nature, he did not know Siva [and did not let him past the door]. Siva cut him down with his trident, together with the elephant that he was mounted on, but when the supreme Sakti praised Siva he offered her a boon, and she said, "This person that you have killed is my son. The fool did not know you, because he was born of a portion of Nature. Please make him live." Siva laughed and revived the illusory

son and gave him a red face and an elephant's head. (10.28-35)

Parvati's implicit inability to distinguish Ganesa from Siva (which is the cause of the problem in other texts) is here cleverly transformed into Ganesa's inability to distinguish Siva from an intruder. But the result is the same: Siva kills Ganesa. And now a further twist is given when the Kirata, facing the same problem of identical form, volunteers to guard the door just as Ganesa does, explicitly in other variants of this story and implicitly here as well.

Another undeserving devotee appears in the "Kedara Khanda"'s version of the *Vaisnava* story of the generous demon, Bali. The transformation is achieved, not by making Bali, the arch Visnu wor-





shipper, a Siva worshipper, but by giving him a former life as a Siva worshipper. Thus Bali's tale is supplemented by the tale of Kitava, which forms a bridge between our basic theme, great sinners who were saved from hell by an accidental act of Siva worship, and a closely related theme, demons who worshipped Siva's *linga* and usurped Indra's throne, of which two variants are narrated in this text. 23 Conflating the categories of "(human) sinner" and "demon," Kitava both gets saved and usurps, and does one of them (the usurping) twice, once as the human sinner Kitava and once when he becomes reincarnate as the demon Bali. Here is the new episode, the episode of Kitava:

> In a former life Bali had been Kitava (rogue), and one day when he was bringing flowers and betel and sandalwood and so forth to his whore, running to her house, he had stumbled and fallen on the ground and passed out for a moment. An idea occurred to him as he regained consciousness, as a result of his former *karma* and his great pain and misery: "Let the perfume and flowers and so forth that fell on the ground be given to Siva." And as a result of that good deed, after his death when Yama's minions took him to hell, he won the place of Indra for a brief period, while Indra, suffering from Brahminicide, was in hiding.
>
> Indra and the other gods were miserable, but Kitava and his servants, delighting in the worship of Siva, were very happy. Then Narada said to Kitava, "Bring Indrani here." But Kitava, the darling of Siva, laughed and said, "I should not speak to Indrani, or have anything to do with her, honored sir." And then he started to give things away; he gave Indra's elephant Airavata and the other things to Agastya and the other sages. But when the brief period allotted to him in heaven was over, the former master, Indra, returned to heaven, and Indrani rejoiced.
>
> Then the fool, Indra, said to Indrani, "Did Kitava make love with you? Tell me truly." The guiltless woman laughed and said to Indra, "You think everyone else is just like you. Kitava is a noble person, free of passion, by the grace of Siva." When Indra heard her words he was ashamed and silent. But when he saw that Kitava had given away all his things, he went down to Yama and complained against him.
>
> Yama said to Kitava, "Giving is prescribed on earth, where actions bear fruit. But no one is supposed to give anything to anyone in heaven, you fool, and so you should be punished,





> because you have not behaved according to the textbooks." But Yama's servant argued that all of Kitava's evil deeds had been burnt to ashes by the grace of Siva and that, because of the greatness of his giving, Kitava did not belong in hell, and Indra returned in embarrassment to heaven. (18.52-116)

This story may be read as an embellishment of the story of Nahusa that has just been told (15.61-89), for Nahusa falls from the position of Indra when he lusts after Indrani, Indra's wife. But it may also be a satire on the notorious *Ramayana* episode of the rejection of Sita by Rama, who is swayed by public rumor that she had succumbed to the demon Ravana.

Most directly, the tale of Kitava is an expansion of the story of Bali, a demon who is punished for his excessive giving, a famous story that has just been alluded to (18.41-44). Here, Kitava is not punished for his excessive giving; on the contrary, Yama's servant expressly says that Kitava obtained his position through giving, and Kitava merely withdraws when his term in office is up. Though Kitava never actually worships the *linga*, the flowers and incense that he "dedicates" to Siva on the doorstep of the brothel (the literal *limen*, like the liminal door of the temple) would normally be placed on the *linga*. And *bhakti*, even accidental *bhakti*, renders all conventional power struggles irrelevant.

The objections that Yama makes elsewhere to the emptiness of hell as a consequence of the democratization of *bhakti* are not only not addressed here but inverted: it is Yama who persuades Indra that Kitava should not go to hell. Yama's objections are explicitly stated, and answered, in a later part of the text, where what amounts to accidental *bhakti* poses a problem that is then inverted to make it not the problem but the solution:

> When sinners merely looked at Skanda they became purified, even if they were the most evil dog-cookers. Yama took Brahma and Visnu and went to Siva and praised him and said, "By the greatness of the sight of Skanda all people are going to heaven, even if they are evil. What should I do about distinguishing between what should and should not be done? For those who are truthful and peaceful, free of lust and anger, virtuous sacrificers, are going to the same place that all the dog cookers and violators of *dharma* are going to. They have all left my place; what is there for me to do now?" Siva replied, "People who have evil within them often do meritorious deeds, and their purification takes place in the mind-and-heart. Women and fools





> and Sudras and the lowest dog cookers are born in evil wombs because of their previous lives, but nevertheless, by fate and their former deeds, they become purified human beings. Do not be amazed at this. . ." And Yama became enlightened. (31.277)

Looked at from the point of view not of the worshipper but of the god of hell, universal salvation *is* a problem. 24 Here, Yama is simply talked out of it. But, as if unsatisfied by this pat solution, the author is then, finally, inspired to tell the story that is the granddaddy of the genre of the devotee saved from hell, the story of Sveta, the *virtuous* devotee, with which we began this analysis. The text then immediately reverts to the sinful and accidental devotee, and tells the final, and by far the most elaborate, story in this series, the penultimate story in the whole book:

> Once upon a time there was a certain Kirata named Canda [Fierce], a man of cruel addictions. He killed fish with a net and various wild animals with arrows, and in his fury he killed birds, and Brahmins, too,25 and his wife was just like him. One night, on the dark fourteenth of Magha, on the great Night of Siva [*sivaratri*], he was hunting a hog. He hadn't caught anything all day, and at night he was up in a sacred *bilva* tree, awake without blinking an eye.26 In order to get a better view of his prey, he cut off many *bilva* leaves and thus, unknowingly, effortlessly, even though he was angry, he did *puja* [worship] to a Siva-*linga* that was under the *bilva* tree. And he spat mouthfuls of water, which chanced to fall on that Siva-*linga*, and by the force of fate, that too became a Siva *puja*, by bathing the *linga*. Then he got down from the tree and went to the water to fish.
>
> His wife stayed up all night worrying about him, and then she followed his tracks, for she was afraid that he had been killed. At dawn she went to bring him food, and saw him by the river. They both bathed, but just as they came out a dog arrived and ate all the food.27 She got mad and started to kill the dog, saying [to her husband], "This evil one has eaten our food, yours and mine. You fool, what will you eat? Tomorrow you will be hungry." Then Canda, dear to Siva, said to her, "I am satisfied by knowing that the dog has eaten the food. What use is this body, anyway? Stop being angry." So she was enlightened by him.
>
> Then Siva sent his messengers with a heavenly chariot. His servants said that they had come to take the Kirata to the





> world of Siva, with his wife, because he had worshipped the *linga* on the Night of Siva. But the Kirata said, "I am a violent hunter, a sinner. How can I go to heaven? How did I worship the Siva-*linga?*" They said, "Siva is pleased with you." Then they told him how on the Night of Siva he had cut the *bilva* leaves and put them on the head of the *linga*, and stayed awake (as had his wife), and they had both fasted. They brought the couple to heaven, with great celebration. (33.1-64)

This is truly a story of amazing grace. It recapitulates and integrates the three stories that we have encountered in a single chapter: *linga* worship by mouthfuls of water from a Kirata, inadvertent worship by a hunter named Canda, and salvation for a man touched by a dog. It also includes the man's wife in the process of his salvation. Let us therefore turn to the theme of women in the "Kedara Khanda."

The Feminization of Visnu

The very first triad of stories about undeserving devotees introduces the corollary to the theorem of Siva worship that will be the basis of the rest of the book: that it is the worship of the *linga*, rather than any other form of Siva worship, that opens all doors and rights all wrongs. Implicit in this assertion is another dogma that the "Kedara Khanda" shares with many other Saiva Puranas: that Siva subsumes Visnu within him. But here the "Kedara Khanda" begins to weave its own secondary agenda, a quasi-feminist agenda. As a result of lying about having seen the top of the *linga*, Brahma is cursed never to be worshipped again; this is also said in other Puranas. But Visnu, who did not lie, is also subjected to a change in worship status:

> When the *linga* raged out of control, Brahma and the sages praised Siva, and he, pacified, told them to ask Visnu for help. They praised Visnu, and he laughed and said, "In the past I saved you from demons, but I can't save you from this *linga*." Then a voice in space, reassuring the gods, said to Visnu, "Envelop this *linga*, Visnu, become the base [*pinda*], and save everyone that moves and that is still." And the lord assented to this in his mind. (7.1-21)

Since, in other versions of this story, it is the Goddess, or Siva's Sakti, who is called in to support and control the *linga* by taking the





form of the *pinda* base (also called the *yoni*, "vagina," or *pitha*, "seat"), the assignment of this role to Visnu in this text amounts to the feminizing of Visnu, the subordination of Visnu to Siva, through the incorporation of Visnu into the Goddess's role in the worship of the *linga*.

And the text goes on to tell us that the whole universe is made of Siva and Sakti; the clear proof of this is the fact that all men have the *linga*, and all women the *pinda* (8.18-19). This affords incidental support to the argument about the "naturalness" (and hence the possibility of accidental performance) of *linga* worship: every human being is walking around with the essential materials for worship. Moreover, the lack of vertical distinction between the male god and human males, on the one hand, and the female goddess and human females, on the other, is then given a horizontal counterpart: there is no distinction between Siva (the male part of the *linga*) and Visnu (its female base, the *pinda)*.

A similar feminization takes place in the telling of the story of the churning of the ocean, which follows the standard plot until the moment when the devastating *halahala* poison appears. Then the text continues:

> Visnu and Brahma and the others, pervaded by the poison, sought the help of Heramba (Ganesa), who propitiated Siva until the supreme Sakti appeared in the form of the *yoni*. Ganesa praised Siva united with Sakti, and the *linga*, pleased by Heramba's praise, swallowed the poison. (10.7-11, 39-56)

This episode does not appear in the extant Sanskrit *Mahabharata* version of the churning of the ocean (where Siva in his anthropomorphic form, rather than as the *linga*, swallows the poison), but it resonantes with another Epic episode that is subsequently related by the "Kedara Khanda":

> When the Soma appeared from the churning, the demon Vrsaparvan stole it and carried it down to the underworld. At the behest of the gods, Visnu took the form of Mohini, a beautiful enchantress, bewitched the demons, took back the Soma, and gave it to the gods. (12.1-74)

Where the *Mahabharata* describes the feminization of Visnu as Mohini in just two verses, 28 and later Puranas add an episode in which Siva is enchanted by this enchantress and embraces her (giving birth to Hariharaputra"the son of Visnu and Siva"),29 the "Kedara





Khanda" inserts into the story a wonderfully cynical conversation between Mohini and Bali, king of the demons:

> Bali said to Mohini, "You must distribute the elixir right away." She smiled and said to Bali, "A smart man shouldn't trust in women. Lies, violence, deception, stupidity, excessive greed, impurity, and cruelty are the natural flaws of women. Like sadistic jackals among beasts of prey, like crows among birds, and like swindlers among menthat's how

> women should be recognized by wise men. How can I make friends with you? Consider who you are, and who I am. Therefore you should think about what should and should not be done.. ." Bali replied, "The women you have been talking about are common women, whom common men like. But you do not belong among those women you have been talking about. No more talk; do what we ask. Distribute the elixir; we will take what you give us, I promise you." (12.18-28)

The self-hating misogyny of Mohini's speech repeats the serious statements of many other texts, beginning with the *Rg Veda*, which puts similar words into the mouth of Urvasi ("There are no friendships with women; they have the hearts of jackals" 30), and Manu ("The bed and the seat, jewelry, lust, anger, crookedness, a malicious nature, and bad conduct are what Manu assigned to women."31) But in the "Kedara Khanda," this can only be a satire on Hindu misogyny, as becomes apparent from a survey of the subversive role of women in this text.

Primitive Feminism in the "Kedara Khanda"

It is worth noting the strong human women in this text, women like Canda's wife. When the gods murder Dadhica to take his body to make their weapons, his wife, Suvarca, curses the gods and does not mince her words: "O you gods, you're worse than anyone, impotent and greedy. Therefore you gods who dwell in heaven will have no progeny" . . . So, too, when the dwarf (Visnu) has taken only two steps and has had Garuda bind Bali with the nooses of Varuna, Bali's wife, Vindhyavali, goes into action. She goes to the dwarf and asks him to step on the heads of her child, herself, and Bali; he does so and sets Bali free to live in Sutala, where he promises that he, Visnu, will dwell as Bali's doorkeeper (a significant reversal of the Saiva pattern, where the devotee becomes the doorkeeper) (17.7-14, 19.32-58).



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But it is the Goddesses Indrani and Parvati who best express the powers of women; after all, they are *called* "power," Saci and Sakti. We have already seen some instances of the text's quasi-feminism in the Goddess's mocking remarks about the resemblance between Siva and his devotees and Indrani's mockery of Indra. Other stories are also told about the Goddess and Indrani, in other traditional episodes that become, through the strength of character attributed to the women, much less traditional. Thus, whereas in the *Mahabharata*, when Nahusa usurps the throne of Indra, Indrani weeps and seeks the help of Brhaspati and Indra, who tell her how to trick Nahusa so that he loses the throne and is cursed to become a snake, 32 in the "Kedara Khanda" she dries her tears and thinks up the plot all by herself:

> When Narada urged the gods to install Nahusa on the throne of Indra (who was once again recuperating from Brahminicide), Saci, hearing the words from the mouth of Narada, burst into tears and retired into the inner apartments of the palace. The gods installed Nahusa as king of the gods, and he summoned Indrani to come to him. Indrani laughed and said, "If he lusts for me, another man's wife, let him come to get me in a nonvehicular vehicle." When Nahusa, deluded with lust for Indrani, heard what she had said, he considered what might be nonvehicular and decided that it was Brahmins rich in asceticism. So he harnessed two of them to his palanquin, and as he drove them on he shouted, "Go! Go!" [*sarpa sarpa*], and so Agastya, one of the sages drawing the palanquin, cursed him to become a serpent [*ajagara*, also known as a *sarpa*].
>
> Saci then sent the gods to search for Indra, and she cursed Brhaspati: "Because you brought two surrogates to me [Nahusa and Yayati, Nahusa's son] while Indra was still alive, someone else will do what you should do while you are alive; he will have your marital luck and beget a famous son in your 'field' [i.e., your wife]. Go and look for Indra with the rest of the gods; if you don't, I'll give you another curse." When he heard what Saci said, Brhaspati went with the other gods. (15.62-89, 16.1-10)

Indrani's curse refers to the well-known ancient story of the adultery of Tara, Brhaspati's wife, with Candra (the moon), resulting in the birth of Budha, the great king. To my knowledge, no other text suggests that this affair took place as the result of a curse of vengeance for Brhaspati's role in pandering for Indra's surrogates with



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Indrani. (Indeed, the *Mahabharata*, following the *Brhaddevata*, tells of a more direct possible cause for Brhaspati's cuckolding: Brhaspati raped the wife of his brother, Utathya. 33 This, too, the "Kedara Khanda" ignores in favor of its own set of connections.34)

Parvati, however, is the great heroine of the "Kedara Khanda," and she is assisted by Rati, the wife of Kama and goddess of sexual pleasure, after Siva has burnt Kama to ashes:

As Parvati wondered how she could get Siva into her power, Rati said to her, "Do not despair, Parvati; *I* will revive Kama." And having consoled Parvati in this way, Rati began to engage in asceticism. Narada then came to Rati and asked whose she was. Furious, Rati said, "I know you, Narada, you're a virgin boy, for sure. Go back wherever you came from, and don't delay. You don't know anything, and all you do is make quarrels. You are the first among lovers of other men's wives, rakes, and low adulterers, people who do not work, parasites.'

When Rati had reviled him in this way, Narada went and told the demon Sambara to abduct Rati. Sambara, deluded by lust for Rati, asked her to come with him, and wanted to grab her by the hand, but she said, "If you touch me, you will be burnt." He took her to his house and put her in charge of the kitchen, where she was known as Mayavati. (21.100-25)

Now, several texts say that, after the death of Kama, Rati was reborn as Mayavati.35 And one says that, after Rati had become Mayavati, Narada visited her and told her, to her benefit, what she was to do.36 But the "Kedara Khanda" alone blames Narada for the degradation of Rati, inflicted in revenge for her spirited denunciation of him (which manages somehow to imply simultaneously that he is sexually innocent and lascivious).

## The Deconstruction of Siva

Parvati herself takes complex revenge against Siva in the final myth told in the "Kedara Khanda," right after the tale of the Kirata, a myth that not only recapitulates all the myths of *linga-worship* that recur in this text but goes on to satirize them. (And we might see in Parvati's masquerade as a mountain woman, a Sabari, a variant of the theme of the mountaineer who worshipped the *linga*.) The story begins as a variant on the well-known, though not particularly early, theme of the dice-game quarrel of Siva and Parvati:





One day the sage Narada came to visit Siva and Parvati on Kailasa and said, "There would be greater pleasure for the two of you in playing dice than in making love." They began to play dice and began to argue, and, as the hosts of Siva joined in the quarrel, Siva's servant, Bhrngi, reminded Parvati of the time when Siva had burnt Kama, and the time when Siva had been reviled at the sacrifice of Daksa and Sati committed suicide. Then Parvati got mad and said to Bhrngi, "You're always trying to come between us. But how can there be any separation between us two? I will give you a curse: be without flesh."

Then, in fury, she put her hand on the serpent Vasuki and took it down from Siva's neck, and [then she took] many other things, ornaments, and the crescent moon, and elephant skin, and then, laughing, she took even his loincloth. When all the troops of Siva averted their faces in modesty, Siva said, "All the sages are laughing at this joke, and Brahma and Visnu. How can you, born in a good family, do this? If you have won, then at least give me back my loincloth." Then she laughed and said, "Why do you need a loincloth, you hermit? You were naked enough when you went into the Pine Forest, begging for alms and seducing the sages' wives. The sages made your 'loincloth' fall down there. And that's why I took it from you in the game of dice."

Hearing that, Siva was angry and looked at her in fury with his third eye. Everyone was terrified, but she laughed and said, "Why are you looking at me with that third eye? I'm not Kala or Kama, nor am I Daksa's sacrifice. I'm not the triple city, or Andhaka. You're wasting your time with that third eye on me." She said a lot of things like this to him, and he set his heart on going to a deserted spot in the forest.

When Siva had gone to the forest, Parvati was tormented by longing in separation. Still, she laughed and said, "I beat him and reduced him to poverty. What can't I do? Without me he is ugly; I made him beautiful. Watch me play a new game with him now." And with that, she set out to go to Siva, taking the form of a magnificent mountain woman [Sabari], dark and slender, with lips like bimba fruits, and she went where Siva was meditating. He woke up and saw her and was filled with lust. He took her by the hand, but as soon as he touched her, she vanished. Then he, who was the destroyer of mistaken perceptions, himself was enveloped in a mistaken perception. Unable to see her, he was tormented by longing in separation.

But then he saw her again, and he asked who she was and

she said, teasing him, "I am seeking my/a husband, 37 a man who is omniscient, independent, unchanging, and the best lord of the universe." He replied, "I am a suitable husband for you, but no one else is." She smiled and said, "You are indeed the husband that I seek. But let me tell you something. You are devoid of virtue.38 For a woman chose you before and won you by her great inner ascetic heat, and you abandoned her in the wilderness." Siva denied that he had abandoned a woman with great inner ascetic heat. When he continued to insist that she marry him, she said he must ask her father, Himalaya.

She took him to her father, stood with him at the door, and said, "This is my father. Ask. Don't be ashamed. He will give me, there is no doubt about that. Don't hesitate." Siva bowed to Himalaya and said, "Best of mountains, give your daughter to me today." Hearing this pitiful speech, Himalaya stood up and said to Siva, "What kind of a joke is this? It doesn't befit you. You're the one who gives everything in the universe." Just then Narada arrived, laughed, and said, "Contact with women always leads to the deception [*vidamba*] of men. You are the lord of the universe. You should speak as befits you." Thus enlightened by Narada, Siva woke up and laughed and said, "You spoke the truth, Narada. Mere contact with women is the downfall of men. Today she deluded me and brought me here; this act was like [a rape] by a ghoul. Therefore I won't stay near this mountain; I'll go to another part of the forest." Then Siva vanished, but they all praised him, and he came back. Drums sounded, and all the gods, Indra and the others, sent a rain of flowers, and the great Siva reigned there with Parvati. (34.20153, 35.1-58)

The arguments about the supremacy of Siva versus Sakti recapitulate arguments that have been made throughout this book about Siva versus Visnu and Visnu as Sakti, beginning with the reviling of Siva at the sacrifice of Daksa. Indeed, this episode refers explicitly to the Daksa episode several times, linking this final episode with the first episode in the "Kedara Khanda," the story of Daksa's sacrifice, in which Sati, as usual, defends Siva with great spirit and reminds her parents and the gods of his great deeds:

Once upon a time, Brahma, you became five-headed in your pride, and Siva made you four-headeddo you remember? Once upon a time, he wandered begging in the Pine Forest, and you cursed him, and his mere limb filled the whole universe,





which became a *linga* at that moment. How can you have forgotten? (3.10-14)

Her words predict several myths that will be told, seriously, later in the book; but she refers to the same myths in this final episode only to mock them, turning the text itself on its head in the end.

Parvati argues, against Bhrngi, that Siva and Sakti are one, despite their quarrels (just as, we have seen, Siva and Visnu are one, despite the quarrels of their devotees). In this way, the myth of Bhrngi, which is not narrated in detail here, is evoked: Bhrngi had wanted to worship Siva without worshipping Parvati, and in punishment for his disrespect for the female side of God, she deprived him of the female side of every person: the flesh. 39 By reviving the quarrel with Bhrngi at this point, the text implicitly analogizes it not only to the old myth of the sacrifice of Daksa but to the new myth, created by the "Kedara Khanda," of the integration of Siva with the feminine, both with Sakti and with the feminized Visnu.

There are also several different sorts of references here to Siva's burning of Kama and of Kala/Yama; these references bring out a parallelism between the two incidents that is reflected in two parallel epithets of Siva (Kamantaka and Yamantaka, or Kalantaka) but is seldom explicitly remarked upon in Sanskrit texts. The myth of Kama is also recapitulated in the episode of the Sabari as a whole, which is a satire on the well-known myth that we have already heard in this text, the episode in which Parvati, having been rejected by Siva as a lovely young girl, returns to him in another form, as an ascetic woman, when he is meditating, inspires him with love, and causes him to ask her father for permission to marry her.

One particular argument of the "Kedara Khanda" version of that episode is particularly relevant here:

When Parvati asked permission to serve Siva while he mediated, he said to Himalaya, "This slender young girl with her terrific hips and her sweet smile must not come into my presence." But Parvati laughed and replied, "You should consider who you are, and who Nature [*prakrti*]is." When he retorted, "I will destroy Nature with my ultimate inner

ascetic heat, and I will stay here without Nature," she said, "How could you transcend Nature? What you hear, what you eat, what you seeit's all Nature. How could you be beyond Nature? You are enveloped in Nature, even though you don't know it. But if you are, in fact, beyond Nature, then what do you have to fear from me?" Siva laughed and let her stay. (20.15-26)





So, too, in the final episode, Parvati reminds him that he literally cannot exist without her.

And, finally, when Parvati teases Siva, she deconstructs the whole mythology of the "Kedara Khanda" and even myths that are not told here, other myths of the third eye such as the ancient myth of the burning of the triple city and the later myth of the impalement of the demon Andhaka. Best of all, by forcing Siva to play what amounts to a game of strip poker, Parvati offers a superb satire on the central myth in this book, the story of the falling of Siva's *linga* in the Pine Forest. In her mockery of her husband, Parvati equates the loincloth with the *linga*, teasing him about the time the sages caused his "loincloth" to fall. In fact, the sages caused his erect penis to fall; does this mean, therefore, that when she takes his loincloth she castrates him, too? Siva himself implicitly mocks and feminizes himself, when he says that he has been treated like the victim of a marriage of the ghouls, which Manu defines thus: "The lowest and most evil of marriages, known as that of the ghouls, takes place when a man secretly has sex with a girl who is asleep, drunk, or out of her mind." 40 Siva seems to be saying that he was out of his mind (presumably with a combination of ordinary lust and the extraordinary illusory powers of the Goddess) when the Sabari seduced him. Where Parvati is at first said to be "tormented by longing in separation," she turns the tables until he himself is "tormented by longing in separation."

This is more than a play on words. The Sakti demonstrates that she, too, can play the otiose tricknow you see me, now you don'tjust as Siva did in the stories of Daksa's sacrifice and the Pine Forest. In doing this, she is usurping the top place, just as he had done to Visnu. By giving the upper hand to Parvati, the text is parodying the basic, assumed paradigm of the worshipper as female and the god as male (a reversal that we may also see in the feminizing of Visnu). So, too, by making Siva the fool who, despite his delusion, "accidentally" wins his own wife (his own deity), the text reverses the conventional roles of god and worshipper. As David Shulman has put it, "The god, too, ends up acting out the logic of reversal no less than his human counterparts."41

When Siva, too, becomes otiose again near the end of the story, ludicrously embarrassed by his public humiliation in proposing to his own wife, just as Indra had been embarrassed (and separated from his wife) by the more serious sin of Brahminicide, the gods bring him back with praise. That praise that brings god back to us, the husband to his wife, the wife to the husband, is the *raison d'être* of the "Kedara Khanda" of the *Skanda Purana*, as it is of all Pu-





ranas: "The people who recite with supreme faith this marvellous glorification of Siva, this Siva text that Siva loves, and the people who listen to it with devotion and delight, they go to the ultimate level of existence" (35.64, the final verse of the "Kedara Khanda").

But the "Kedara Khanda" differs from other Puranas in its inclusive attitude to "the people" who listen and recite the Purana. By granting the grace of god to unregenerate sinners and to women, the "Kedara Khanda" is salvaging two human groups that more conventional Puranas have marginalized and excluded: women and (male) sinners who do not consciously worship at all. The justification for including both is the same: the worship of the *linga* and *yoni* is so "natural" (because we are all carrying around the materials for the liturgy) that it can be carried out mindlessly, by people who do not know what they are doing when they worship god. So, too, women in this text represent "Nature" (*prakrti*)in opposition to "culture" (the elaborate ritualism of other Puranas, from which women are excluded). This is, as we have seen, the argument by which Parvati gains access to Siva so that she can ultimately conquer him: he cannot live without Nature. This being so, it is through natural acts of worship that sinners and women find their way to him.

In salvaging these discarded pieces of society, the "Kedara Khanda" also salvages discarded pieces of Puranic lore, off-beat stories, precious scraps, bottom-fished from the great ocean of Indian story. We, the readers, thus participate in a double salvation when we read the "Kedara Khanda": of ourselves (women and sinners) and of the scraps of stories.

Appendix:

The Contents of the "Kedara Khanda"

This is how Ludo Rocher describes the entire contents of the "Kedara Khanda":

> The Kedarakhanda (1.1) begins with the destruction of Daksa's sacrifice. It devotes several chapters to the churning of the ocean, and proceeds to describe the birth and activities of Parvati, up to her marriage with Siva. The description of Karttikeya's birth is followed by that of his successful fight with the demon Taraka. The khanda ends with the story in which Siva loses everything to Parvati in a game of dice, their temporary separation, and their reunion.42

42. Ludo Rocher, *The Puranas*, Vol. 2, fasc. 3 of *A History of Indian Literature*, ed. Jan Gonda (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1986), 230.





This is, more precisely, a summary of those parts of its contents that are known from other Sanskrit texts as well, and it forms a consecutive narrative sequence, an integrated story. But it does not provide us with an armature on which to build all the rest of the book. For there is more, far, far more. Here, in brief, is what is in the "Kedara Khanda":

1.1.1. Introduction: the sages in the Naimisa Forest question Lomasa about Siva.

1.1.1-4 Siva destroys Daksa's sacrifice.

1.1.5 Indrasena, a very evil man, says "Hara" unconsciously and is saved from hell. A Kirata (mountaineer and hunter) is taken to Siva's heaven.

1.1.6 The Pine Forest sages cause Siva's *linga* to fall.

1.1.7 The *lingodbhava*: the flame *linga* appears to Visnu and Brahma.

1.1.8 A man steals a bell and is saved from hell. Ravana worships Siva and Visnu becomes incarnate as Rama.

1.1.9 The demon Bali takes Indra's throne. The gods and demons churn the ocean.

1.1.10 Visnu and Brahma and the others, pervaded by the poison, seek help from Ganesa, the supreme Sakti in the form of the *yoni*, and the *linga* form, which swallows the poison.

1.1.11-14 Visnu appears as Mohini, and the gods get the Soma.

1.1.15 Indra kills Visvarupa and suffers from Brahminicide. Nahusa takes Indra's throne but is undone by his lust for Indra's wife.

1.1.16-17. His Brahminicide dispelled, Indra kills Vrtra and incurs Brahminicide again.

1.1.18 Kitava (Bali in a former life) is saved from hell and takes Indra's throne.

1.1.19 Indra wins his throne back from Bali, with Visnu's help.

1.1.20-31 Siva burns Kama, marries Parvati, and begets Skanda.

1.1.32 Sveta, the devotee of Siva, is saved from hell.

1.1.33 A Kirata is saved from hell.

1.1.34 The Goddess tricks Siva at dice and in adultery, becoming a mountain woman (Sabari).

II.
FROM SOUTH TO NORTH AND BACK AGAIN





# 4
# Purana as Brahminic Ideology

*Velcheru Narayana Rao*

During Labor Day weekend in 1985 I attended a meeting of Telugu people in the United States held in Los Angeles, where a singer of *harikatha* ("Tales of Visnu") gave a performance. *Harikatha* singing is relatively new in Andhra; evidence suggests that Ajjada Adibhatla Narayana Dasu (1864-1945) was the originator of this tradition. A learned Sanskrit scholar and a wonderful musician, Narayana Dasu brought a new popularity to the recitation of Puranic stories, which he had composed in a musical style, interspersed with entertaining prose commentaries. This new genre acquired wide popularity and has been adopted by hundreds of learned singers. Along with its popularity came a respectable history of the genre. At the beginning of every *harikatha* performance, the singer spoke, as a part of his performance, about the antiquity of his profession. The singer whom I heard in Los Angeles did the same. To paraphrase his statement, he said:

> The first *harikatha* singer was Narada, the celestial singer who sang for the god Visnu. Then came Kusa and Lava, the twin sons of Rama, who sang the *Ramayana* for him. (He abridged the list and stopped with only two because he was singing in Los Angeles and not in India.) And then in the Kali Age (the last of the four Ages) the great guru Narayana Dasu was born to popularize *harikatha* on the earth.





Let me narrate another anecdote concerning similar connections to mythology. On October 31, 1854, a Brahmin village land owner, Maciraju Venkatrayudu, sent an appeal to the British governor of Bengal. His land was occupied by the local Kapu, a non- Brahmin peasant. His complaints to the lower officers of the administration did not help. The Brahmin felt that the lower officers were working hand in glove with the Kapu peasant. Therefore he thought that the highest authority of the land should be informed of this injustice. Venkatrayudu wrote: "During the time of the kings who ruled this country in the past, King Srirama, the sixteen great emperors beginning with Hariscandra, King Bali and King Vikramarka, Brahmins suffered no poverty. In your government, however, you treat all human beings equally and you are not respecting the code of *varna* and *asrama* [class and stage of life]." Then the Brahmin went on to quote from a Sanskrit text showing how King Nala treated the Brahmins. Finally he appealed to the governor-general to restore his land to him. 1

Going a few centuries back to the period of King Krsnadevaraya (sixteenth century), I would like to quote one more illustration of the use of mythology. This relates to the genealogy that Peddanna, the court poet, provides for his royal patron. Peddanna writes in his *Manucaritra*:

> First there was the moon. His son was Budha.
> To him was born Pururava, and he, in turn,
> generated Ayuvu, and to Ayuvu,
> Yayati the king was born.
>
> Yadu and Turvasu were born as his sons
> killers of the enemies and connoisseurs of the arts
> and of these two, Turvasu, a vessel
> of virtue, acquired illustrious fame.
>
> His family became the dynasty of Tuluvas
> to which many kings were born, filling the world
> in its entirety with their surging and eternal
> fame. Then in that family, Timma was born.2

Yadu and Turvasu, as is well known, are mythical descendants of Budha, who was the son of the moon god, whereas the Tuluvas are historical, as is Timma of this dynasty.

What is common to all the three cases I have mentioned above is that all of them begin with what we call "myth" and move into





what we call "history," with no dividing line between them. This is one continuous line of events. I intend to show in the early part of this paper that this continuity is what the Puranic worldview promotes, and that it results from the ideological frame of Puranas. Later in the paper I shall attempt to explore the nature of Puranas as conceptually organized texts whose meanings are best perceived by what they say about themselves as well as by what they do not say.

The Five Distinguishing Marks

Again and again we are told that Puranas have five *laksanas*, or distinguishing marks. 3 These components of a Purana are primary creation or cosmogony (*sarga*), secondary creation, or the destruction and renovation of worlds, including chronology (*pratisarga*), the genealogy of gods and patriarchs (*vamsa*), the reigns of the Manus (*manvantarani*), and history, "or such particulars as have been preserved of the princes of the solar and lunar races, and of their descendants to modern times (*vamsanucarita*)."4

Earlier scholars who discussed the five *laksanas* accepted them as constituting the definition of a Purana. But many Puranas do not conform to this definition. Therefore the conclusion was that the Puranas that now exist are not the old versions of the Puranas and that much of the older version has been lost.

Scholars also thought that the five features constituted the subjects or the contents of the Puranas. Again there was a problem, because the information regarding the five *laksanas* was very minimal in most of the Puranas. To quote Vans Kennedy, "Though these topics are certainly treated of at greater or less length in most of the Puranas, they still by no means form the principal subject of the study"5 As Ludo Rocher has stated, "The fact that the *Puranas* contain relatively little *pañcalaksana* materials has been noticed repeatedly in the scholarly literature."6 According to Kane's calculation, the five topics occupy less than three per cent of the extant Mahapuranas.7

Then why does *pañcalaksana* continue to be considered important for distinguishing a Purana from other genres? Setting aside suggestions that *pañcalaksana* is a literary myth,8 or explanations that our understanding of this compound word is erroneous and that it means something else,9 I would like to suggest and try to demonstrate that *pañcalaksana* is the ideological frame that transforms whatever content is incorporated into that frame. Since the ideas of





*pañcalaksana* are tacitly assumed in the Brahminic worldview, they do not even appear in every Purana and do not constitute a sizeable length of the text even when thy appear.

I shall not concern myself with the texts that describe the *pañcalaksana* for identifying the oldest strata of the Puranas. My interest is not text-historical. I am interested, rather, in the nature of text as an ideological product. The strategy here is to listen to what the texts say and what they do not say. It is analogous to the question Nietzsche asked: What is man saying? What is he hiding when he says what he says? By asking these questions, I believe, one can see the ideology of text production, which, in the words of Macherray is "silently inscribed" within the text. 10

All civilizations make their own past to make sense of the present, to control the present. When a new power emerges, the first thing it does to is to reject the old past and to create a new one in its place. This is done not just by altering the "facts" of the past but by creating a new way of perceiving the "facts." An extreme instance of creating a new way of perceiving facts is evidenced when the very concepts of time and space in which events take place are changed.

Such a change in the concepts of time and space was made when Western civilization via the British colonial power came to dominate India. An earlier concept of time and space is that of Brahminic civilization, which coexists with what might be called, for want of a better name, a "folk concept" of time and space. Thus, India has had three different ways of conceptualizing time and space, all of which are still at work in the lives of Indian people. The low-caste, nonliterate people

have a folk concept of time/space, uppercaste Sanskrit-educated Brahmins have a Puranic concept of time/space, and Westernized educated Indians have a modern concept of time/space. My low-caste milkmaid has great difficulty in understanding how I calculate the first day of the month (according to the Gregorian calendar, when I get my salary and she gets paid for the milk she had supplied to me all the month) without the aid of the moon. I have a similar difficulty in reckoning without the aid of my family priest the death anniversary of my father, which is to be observed according to the Brahminic *pañcangam* calendar.

Folk time is repetitive and regenerative. It shares some of the features of a cyclic view of time, such as the return of similar events like seasons, phases of the moon, and so on; but it does not deteriorate and therefore does not spiral downward. Folk time is analogous with agricultural seasons: the rainy season, which brings growing crops, then a season of harvesting, and then summer, when the earth is dried up followed by a rains and new life.





Puranic time, however, deteriorates. Each of the four Ages (*yugas*) is inferior to the previous one until the final dissolution (*pralaya*) completes the cycle and starts a new one. Thus it spirals downward until a new cycle begins. In keeping with this view, the Puranas say that the texts themselves deteriorate. The *Matsya Purana* says that originally the Puranas were one Purana, which belonged to the world of the gods (*devaloka*)and was a hundred million verses long (*satakotipravistara*). For the benefit of human beings, who have an inferior intellect, Hari took the form of Vyasa and reduced the huge text into eighteen texts with a total of four hundred thousand *slokas*. This story repeats itself. Vyasa is born in every third *yuga*. Krsnadvaipayana is the Vyasa in the twenty-eighth third *yuga* of the eon of the White Boar.

It is in this context that I propose to examine the *pañcalaksana* of the Puranas. *Laksana* is not a definition; nor do the five *laksanas* inform us of the contents of a Purana. *Laksana*, as the dictionary tells us, is a distinguishing mark. Further more, *laksanas* are not necessarily objective, empirically observed facts; they could be perceived "facts." If Brahmin scholars say that Puranas have the five *laksanas*, they have them. The question, for me, is not locating, textually, where they exist and then examining their relative length in words as determinants of their importance or antiquity. The question rather is why Brahmin scholars call them distinguishing marks. There is plenty of evidence that a Purana is viewed as having the five *laksanas*. Not only does an early text like *Namalinganusasana* identify Puranas with *pañcalaksana*, and a number of Puranas themselves speak of the five distinguishing marks, but as late a text as *Sukraniti* says, describing a Pauranika (a Purana performer/scholar), "One who is a scholar of literary theory, who is knowledgeable in music, has a good voice, and knows the five *laksanas*, creation and the others, such a man is known as a Pauranika." 11

The five *laksanas* order the events of the Purana. They provide the listeners with a view of time and space in which the events narrated in the Puranas occur. In other words, the *pañcalaksanas* create a world and a worldview.

## Puranizing the Folk Tradition

Any event placed in the frame of the *laksanas* will have a specific meaning for anyone who lives in this particular world. If I say that I wrote my paper on July 25, 1985 of the common era, in





Visakahpatnam, South India, that date and place constitute only a small part of the text of my paper. For all of us who participate in the ideology of dating things on the linear scale of time, it does not even appear to be significant. But then, it is not the same thing as saying that I wrote my paper in the first quarter (*prathama pada*)of the fourth Age (the Kali Age) of the reign (*manvantara*)of Manu Vaivasvata, in the eon (*kalpa*)of the white boar (*svetavaraha*),sitting in a place located in the southern part of the land (*daksina digbhaga*)with reference to Mount Meru. Locating an event in time and place appears nominal, if you participate in the specific ideology that gives you those concepts of time and space. The contrast is striking if you do not participate in that ideology. For example, questions regarding when Vyasa was born and when the Puranas were composed would have two completely different answers in these two different systems of belief.

To illustrate the nature of ideological change that a folk story undergoes when it is Puranized, let me cite a story of the Komati caste of Andhra. Komatis are a caste of merchants who were at one time considered a left-handed caste. Now their status has moved up and they are included in the Vaisya class, the third class in the four *varna* system. The story of the Komatis centers on their caste goddess Kanyaka, whose name means "a virgin." The story is set in Penugonda, the city of the

Komatis in West Godavari district. There the wealthy Komati leader Kusumasresti lives with his daughter Kanyaka, the most beautiful woman in the world. One day, the king of the area visits the city and the Komatis receive him with honor; Kanyaka welcomes him with a flame offering. When the king sees her, he desires her and sends word to her father that he wishes to marry her; if the father refuses, he will invade the city and abduct her.

For the Komatis this is a serious problem. It would be loss of caste purity to give a woman from their caste to a non-Komati man. And not to be able to protect themselves when they are forced to surrender would be humiliating. The Komati elders meet to discuss the crisis, but cannot find any solution. They conclude that they are powerless to fight and some even suggest a surrender so that they can gain favors from the king.

Now Kanyaka evaluates the situation. She sends word to the king that her father agrees to the marriage but needs time to prepare for it. The king is to wait outside the city, behind the hills surrounding it. Meanwhile, Kanyaka assembles the elders and informs them of her intention to immolate herself. She asks which caste families will be willing to die with her; among the 102 families





*(gotras*) who agree to die with her, she selects only the wives and husbands, leaving the yet unmarried young men and women to continue the caste line. All other families are ordered out of the caste.

She then orders a deep pit to be dug and a fire kindled in it. When the king sends some soldiers to see what is causing the delay, they learn of Kanyaka's plans and decide to serve her instead of the king. When the soldiers do not return, the king grows suspicious and invades the city, but it is too late; Kanyaka and the others have died in the fire. Before that, however, Kanyaka has sanctioned a code of conduct for the caste. Cross-cousin marriage is never to be avoided, even when the boy or girl is poor, sick, or deformed; all Komati girls are to be given her name. All Komati girls, moreover, are to be born ugly so that no man will desire them. She also ordains that the king who caused this calamity will die instantly when he enters the city. Penugonda is to become a pilgrimage center for Komatis with Kanyaka as its goddess, and an annual ritual is to be celebrated there in her honor.

This is the summary of the folk version of the story, which I gathered in Andhra Pradesh from interviews with the folk singers called "Mailarlu."

In the *Vasava Kanyaka Purana*, a Sanskrit text that claims to be a part of the *Sanatsujatiya Khanda* of the *Skanda Purana*, the story remains faithful to the outlines given above, but becomes Puranized.

First, the story is set in the Naimisa Forest. Suta is the narrator. Saunaka and other sages ask him to tell them a story of the Vaisyas. This story is narrated to Dharmanandana (Yudhisthira) by Adisesa, the ancient snake. Being set in a Puranic context, the story elaborately narrates how it first takes place in the world of gods (*devaloka*). A *gandharva* (demigod) there falls in love with a Vaisya girl, but the Vaisya elders reject his proposal to marry her. The *gandharva* curses the Vaisyas to fall from the world of gods onto the earth, where they will all burn in fire and perish. In return, the Vaisyas curse the *gandharva* to take a miserable human birth and die a horrible death. The Vaisyas are reluctant to go to the earthly world of sin, but the gods insist that they are needed there to restore order and trade and to uplift the human beings. And in the end they will return to the world of Siva through their death by fire. After the *gandharva* is born as the king and the girl as Kanyaka, the story is reenacted on earth. 12

It is obvious that these changes in the story are not neutral. Placing the story in the Puranic context transforms the nature of the events. To make a quick note of such transformations, the





merchant-caste Komatis are now Vaisyas with a status in the four-class system. They are here in the human world for a purpose; they are no ordinary profit seekers. The events of the story are reenactments of a predetermined script, and the Vaisyas are part of a divine scheme. In the folk version, Kanyaka is the chief player, who makes decisions for herself as well as for the caste. In the Sanskrit version, the decision-making role is played by the Brahmin priest Bhaskaracarya, who is obeyed by all the Vaisyas. Kanyaka, in this version, is a chaste woman, obeying the commands of the family and the priest.

Vast bodies of folk/regional stories, events, legends, and histories have been incorporated into the Puranas along with

prescriptive codes of behavior appropriate to people of different stations of life. Such incorporation has made a Brahminic interpretation of the material possible without necessarily erasing local color and regional flavor.

The ideological import of the Puranas is not limited to the *pañcalaksana* frame; it is inscribed in the concepts that surround the Purana texts. We have a tendency to look at the Puranas as disparate texts, each neatly bound in identifiable volumes. But the texts do not work in isolation; they are part of a totality of a text tradition with intertextual relationships and commentorial contexts. One could make sense of any of these texts only by listening to the texts as a part of this tradition.

Purana: What it is and What it is Not

One way to conceptualize the Puranas is to compare them with texts that are not Puranas. Such a contrast is made by means of two variables, sound (*sabda*)and meaning (*artha*), the two technically inseparable components of a word. Mammata, the twelfth-century writer on poetics, tells us that the Veda is sound-primary (*sabdapradhana*), and Purana is meaning-primary (*arthapradhana*), while ornate poetry (*kavya*) accords equal importance to sound and meaning (*sabdarthapradhana*). This aphorism is worth exploring. If the Veda is important for its sound, it is unalterable. Every nuance of this sound has to be reproduced without change. It cannot be written down, because a graphic representation of the sound does not guarantee its accurate reproduction; nor can it be translated into another language, paraphrased, or summarized, because any such effort changes its sound. If, then, the sound is fixed, its context is also fixed and unalterable. The fact that it is orally reproduced





does not make it an oral text. It is more fixed than any written text; it is inscribed in sound.

We know that in practice, many who recite the Veda do not even know its meaning, nor are they expected to know. On the other hand, those who know the meaning may not often chant the Veda; they have not learned the chanting well enough to reproduce the sound correctly. Vedic sound-text is preserved in complex chanting styles with terrible taboos invoked against any mispronunciation. The Vedic text is preserved in India as a mummy is preserved in an Egyptian tomb. Nothing can be added to it, and nothing can be transformed by it.

An unalterable, fixed text, by itself, is incapable of serving as an active vehicle of ideology. For that you need a text flexible in content but fixed in its ideological apparatus. *Purana* and *itihasa*, which are often combined to make one compound word, are such texts, which serve as correlates to the Veda. Vatsyana says in the *Nyayabhasya*: the subject matter of *itihasapurana* is the events of the world. 13 It is also stated that the Veda speaks like a king, a Purana like a friend, and a *kavya* like a beloved woman (*prabhusammita*, *mitrasammita*, and *kantasammita*).14 The contrast, the tradition wants us to believe, is not in the essential meaning but only in the style. And there is a difference not only in style but also in status.

Elsewhere I have argued that authorship of a text, in the Indian tradition, is not intended to inform us about the actual producer of the text, to offer biographical data about him, but has a semiotic function of conveying the status of the text.15 The texts of the highest authority are above human authorship. The Veda comes under this classification. Texts of the next level of authority are composed by a superhuman, and therefore infallible, person, Vyasa. The texts of the next level of authority are the *kavyas*, made by human poets, who have creative abilities given by Sarasvati, the goddess of arts, but who are still human and therefore fallible. You could find errors in a Kalidasa, but not in a Vyasa, and certainly not in the Veda.

If Purana is valued for its meaning, it is also stated that it is not the meaning we get from its words; it is the meaning known to the *rsi*, the one who sees. A popular statement about Sridhara, who wrote a commentary on the *Bhagavata Purana*, says, "Vyasa knows, Suka knows; whether the king [Pariksit] knows or not, Sridhara knows everything, because of the blessing of the Man-lion god."16

The person who knows the meaning of the Purana is in a class by himself; he belongs to the status of Vyasa, Suka, and the commentator Sridhara. This is knowledge beyond logic (*na hantavyani*





*hetubhih*). It is recognized that Puranas differ in status among themselves. 17 But those differences do not lead to a contradiction in meaning. A *Mahabharata* aphorism reconciles the apparent problem:

> The revealed texts conflict with each other as

the remembered texts do.
And there is no seer whose words are the authority.
The essence of *dharma* lies hidden from view.
So, follow the path of great men.18

The great men, *mahajana*, are the commentators, the knowers of the meaning.

The Author/Speaker of the Puranas

Like that of the Veda, the origin of the Purana is beyond humans. Brahma spoke the Puranas, from all four of his mouths. According to the *Naradiyaparana*, the Puranas came first and then the Veda.19 The *Markandeya Purana* says that as soon as Brahma was born, both the Purana and the Veda came out of his mouth; the seven *rsi*s took the Veda and the *munis* took the Purana.20 Vyasa, as we have seen, was only the compiler and editor of the texts in an abridged form.

Then there are different speakers of the Puranas for different listeners. Each Purana has a specific speaker. However, it is important to note that no speaker ever directly narrates. All the Purana narratives are reported narratives. Each speaker has an earlier speaker. Each listener has an earlier listener. They look inward and backward drawing us into an ideologically closed environment. But if the Puranas are ideologically closed texts, they are functionally open texts: they have accepted into their fold events, stories, legends, and occurrences of many regions and communities, transforming them to confirm to a fixed ideology.

Purana and Orality

Puranas are available as written texts, and we know that as such they cause the worst possible headaches to scholars who work





on critical editions. One reason suggested for the state of Puranic texts is that they were originally oral and were later put into writing. Continuing our position of looking into the text for what it says and for what it does not say, we find that inside the text Puranas do not furnish evidence that they were written texts, except for the story of Ganesa as Vyasa's scribe, which occurs in the *Mahabharata*. In fact, in Puranic literature the Sanskrit verb *likh*, "to write," was never used to mean "to compose." Purana texts are spoken. Writing was known in India from a very early period, at least the third century B.C.E., but its use was limited to preserving a text rather than producing it or communicating it. Scribes were a different group of people in India, who, like modern day typists, specialized in a technical skill. There are many instances, even as late as the nineteenth century, of scholars who could not "write." They composed the texts mentally and recited them orally, and then the scribe wrote them down. But the Purana scholar who did not write was not illiterate. Sanskrit has a syllabic organization independent of the graphic form of the letters. The *varna*, the basic unit of Sanskrit syllabary, is a sound unit roughly equivalent to a phoneme. Sanskrit grammarians syllabified the language and developed a sophisticated morphological analysis but felt no compelling need to write it down. This situation is different from that of the Western languages, where "letter" indicates a graphic form, with a name of its own, distinct from the several phonemic values that it represents. In the West, to be literate in a language inevitably means to be able to write, but in India there is also a kind of oral literacy, as it were. The Purana scholar had all the sophistication of the language scholar, with a complete awareness of grammatical organization. Therefore, he set himself apart from the illiterate oral poet who not only could not write but also lacked any awareness of the grammar of his language.

Thus, while the internal evidence in the texts of the Puranas shows that they were originally oral, it is important for us to note that their orality is different from the orality of the folk narratives. The orality of the Puranas is literate orality. These are scholars who are oral in performing the Puranas, and probably even in composing some of them, but who are very proud of their knowledge of grammar and their ability to possess a written text of what they perform orally. Therefore we meet with an interesting contradiction. The texts say they were oral, Brahma uttered them, Vyasa spoke them, and a number of his disciples narrated them. But outside the text you can see that every Pauranika values the written tradition by carrying a book with him. An oral narrative of the illiterate low

castes is derisively called in Telugu a *pukkitipurana*, an "oral Purana," referring to the fact that it does not have a written text to authenticate it. In summary, a Purana without a written text that says in writing that it is not a written text but a text spoken by a great God, is not an authentic Purana.

What the Puranas Say

At this point it will be useful to summarize what the Puranas say about themselves so that we can go on to the next step, to examine what they do not say.

1. Brahma originally uttered the Puranas; in their original form they are one hundred million.

2. Vyasa in every *manvantara* organizes the Puranas into eighteen texts by abridging them for the benefit of the inferior humans, whose intelligence, over the course of generations, gradually deteriorates until the end of the Kali Age.

3. A Purana has five features, features that are valued as definitive marks of the genre. Together these five features provide a concept of time and space to the audience of the Purana.

4. Puranas speak like a friend, whereas the Veda speaks like a master, but they say the same thing.

5. Puranas are oral.

6. In the Purana tradition, the earlier and mythical narrators are more authoritative than the later human narratives.

7. A Purana is valued for its meaning, a meaning that is known only to the sage or sage-like commentator.

What Puranas do Not Say

Texts come into writing when someone records what he has heard earlier or when he composes the text himself. The vast body of written materials of the Puranas obviously came into existence because a host of scholars wrote them. But the Puranas do not say who





wrote them. A large body like the Purana literature, which clearly received materials from different sources, including folk sources, contains a host of self-contradictions. But the Puranas maintain that such contradictions are only apparent and that, underneath, they are all one, with a unified meaning that is in conformity with *sruti*, the Veda. Puranas do not inform us where the different narratives and other received elements were borrowed from, nor do they give us any understanding of how such materials are transformed by being incorporated into the Puranas. Finally, the Puranas do not inform us why it is said that there are eighteen Mahapuranas and eighteen Upapuranas, while the textual evidence shows that the actual number is greater. Nor are we told what precise reasons generated the difference between the Upa- and Mahapuranas.

Anyone acquainted with Hindu society with its hierarchy and differences in status, religious oppositions, and divisions of caste knows that it presents an intense scene of conflicts and tensions. At the same time the dominant ideology of the society presents a homogeneous view of a well-ordered society. But despite the best efforts of the dominant ideology to present a homogeneous picture, we can still detect the ideological tensions both within the texts and outside the texts. I shall present some evidence to show that such tensions exist between the Vaidikas and the Pauranikas, between the Pauranikas and the Alankarikas (scholars of ornate poetry), between one group of Puranas and another group, and finally between the literate Pauranikas and the illiterate low-caste oral-epic singers.

The great respect that a reciter of the Veda receives in Hindu society is well known. But what is less well known is that he is also slighted as a *vedajada*, a moron whose mind is dulled by constant repetition of the Veda. *Chandas* in Sanskrit means a "Veda verse." A *chandasa* therefore means one who is well versed in the Veda. But in popular Sanskrit, a *chandasa* is a disrespectful term that refers to a stupid ritualist, who does not understand the way of the world as a Pauranika or a *kavya* poet does. Connoisseurs of *kavya* give Vyasa the nickname *cakarakuksi*, "one who has *ca* syllables in his belly." A *sloka* in Puranic Sanskrit contains a number of filler syllables, *ca*s, as in *sargas ca pratisargas ca vamso manvantarani ca*. For a *kavya* poet who values a tightly composed style, this is poor Sanskrit. The statement by Cornelia Dimmitt and J. A. B. van Buitenen that the Puranas are "composed in Sanskrit of a mediocre quality" reflects a *kavya* bias. 21 There is also another bias, often heard from grammarians and other *sastra* experts, that Puranas are popular literature, meant for the ordinary folk. The implication is that they are not good *sastra*.

It is well known that the Puranas are classified according to the system of three *gunas*, or strands that together constitute matter: lucidity, or goodness (*sattva*); energy, or passion (*rajas*); and torpor, or darkness (*tamas*). Thus there are Puranas characterized by lucidity (*sattvika*), Puranas characterized by energy (*rajasika*), and Puranas characterized by torpor (*tamasika*). The *Parasarya Upapurana* even states that the Puranas of torpor are unworthy of reading. The dispute as to whether a particular Purana is a *Mahapurana* or an *Upapurana* also belongs in this category. The *Brahmavaivarta Purana* states that the five *laksanas* apply only to *Upapuranas* and that Puranas that have more than ten *laksanas* are known as *Mahapuranas*. If one were to pursue this logic further, the *Matsya, Vayu*, and *Brahma Puranas* would have to lose their status and be classified as *Upapuranas*.

The Change in the Nature of the Puranas

Like all the aspects of Brahminic Hinduism, Puranas have also undergone a major shift as result of *bhakti*. The devotional mode of relationship between the deity and the devotee, and between one devotee and other devotees, has a profound influence on the Puranas. The mode of Purana composition has changed significantly; the *Bhagavata Purana* marks that shift more definitively than any other Purana.

While it is not easy to demonstrate the shift in any detail in the span of this paper, I shall refer to one prominent feature of the *Bhagavata Purana* here. Let me quote from the Telugu version of this Purana, where Pariksit asks Suka for the story of Krsna's birth. 22

> He is the form of Time and Being. He is inside and outside of people in this world. He gives life and death, bondage and liberation. Pray, narrate his story in full.
> You said that (Bala) Rama was the son of Rohini. Then why was he in the womb of Devaki? How did the lotus-eyed lord leave his parents to live with the cowherds? Where did he live? What did he do, and why did he kill his uncle Kamsa? How long did he live as a man on earth? How many wives did he take? And what else did he do? Tell me everything of the life of Madhava.
>
> And further he said: The more I hear you, the more I drink





> the nectar of Krsna's stories that flows from your mouth, my body grows livelier; my grief is gone; I feel neither hunger nor thirst, my heart is pleased.
>
> When Pariksit had said this, the son of Vyasa replied to him: Visnu's stories purify the man who enjoys them and the man who asks for them, like water from the river which flows from Visnu's foot.

Pariksit's request is to be informed of the story of Krsna's birth; but a closer look will reveal that he actually asks to listen to a story he already knows, for the joy of listening to Krsna's story another time, for the mere joy of hearing. The earlier Puranas have informed their listeners about creation, mythology, history, and a host of other subjects, instructed them in the essential religious modes of behavior, sermonized on codes of conduct, and legitimized local gods and goddesses. The *bhakti* Puranas now essentially create an atmosphere of participation in religious ecstasy. The emphasis is not on information but rather on a renewed opportunity to experience the divine. It is not communication but communion.

While this shift in the aesthetics of the Purana sets the *bhakti* Puranas in a class by themselves, the Pauranika tradition indicates this by a change in the number of *laksanas* that this Purana contains: instead of the usual five *laksanas*, the

*Bhagavata Purana* has ten. This numerical adjustment is an effort on the part of the Brahminic ideology to signify two things: one, the incorporation of *bhakti* into its fold and, two, Puranic approval of *bhakti*. But still the enhancement in the number of *laksanas* leads to a small-scale controversy regarding the relative status of Purana texts. *Bhakti* Puranas now claim far higher status than pre-*bhakti* Puranas. But in Hindu society, this is no more problematic than a caste that is normally classed low but claims a higher status in society and justifies its claim to an enhanced self-image because of a greater devotion to a deity than other castes or because of some such merit.

Sociologists study texts as models for societies; they study societies as texts. I am suggesting the reverse. We should look at texts in India as a society. Sanskrit texts are organized just as Brahminic society is organized, in four *varnas*: Brahmanas, Ksatriyas, Vaisyas, and Sudras. We know that, in reality, we find hundreds of different castes, and we do not find the neat classification of the four *varnas*. I am afraid that we in Purana studies are like the early empirical anthropologists who found a bewildering variety of *jati*s and were at a loss to understand why Brahmins spoke of only four. They later



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knew that the *varna* is an ideological system that organizes the *jati*s into a Sanskritic conceptual scheme. I suggest that if we are to understand Puranas, their status in Brahminic textual traditions, and their role in Brahminic culture, we get little help from a empirical study of the Puranic texts themselves. We have to listen to what the tradition says and what it does not say, to consider the totality of the Brahminic textual tradition as an ideological system.



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5
On Folk Mythologies and Folk Puranas

*A. K. Ramanujan*

Among the narrative genres of oral folk traditions, I'd like to include one that may be called "folk mythologies," to be distinguished from folk epics, ballads, the various types of folktales, and so forth. When these folk mythologies are related to a local cult, caste, with its own origin myths, sacred calendar, and sacred geography, they tend to crystallize around a god-figure into long narratives that may be called "folk Puranas." The best known of these are *sthalapuranas* of the kind that David Shulman has studied for Tamil Nadu. 1 Whatever their oral sources, they tend to get written and elaborated by named poets. U. Ve. Caminatiar, in his autobiography2 speaks of his guru in the nineteenth century being commissioned to write these "temple myths."

Folk mythologies of the kind I'm talking about haven't been written or written down except by folklorists in the last few decadeshere I confine myself to the Kannada region where I've done my field studies. About five of them are well known in different districts of that area. In the latter part of this paper, I shall speak in detail of only one and present a section of itthe *Maleya Madesvara* narrative of about twenty-five thousand lines, some fifteen hundred pages in print, collated (and unfortunately conflated) by P. K. Rajasekhara in 1973.3 It tells the story of Madappa, a god/hero/saint of the Southern Mysore hills, his arrival from the north, traveling from place to place in search of parents (as a form of Siva, he has none



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and has to acquire suitable ones), then in pursuit of an evil Bali-like demon king (who has imprisoned all the celestials and set even Parvati to menial tasks), and then in search of devotees. In these searches, he ruthlessly tricks and destroys wicked men and women who refuse him oil for his bath or food for his begging bowl; and he brings his devotees wealth, children, and power. Each of these episodes is set in a Mysore location that acquires a name from the incident described. His trail and his enemies and supporters make the geography sacred and mythic. Rivers, valleys, stones, hills, and plants are revalorized in this process. For instance, villagers show visitors a protrusion in a rock that commemorates the demon trying to embrace Parvati: but she disappears and leaves a rock in his arms. But his phallus penetrates and goes through the rockleaving to this day a visible protrusion.

In the interests of placing folk Puranas in perspective, I shall digress a little and talk about the ambience of these mostly uncollected but pervasive folk mythologies out of which the Puranas are made.

One could speak of several kinds of relations between the Sanskritic (which for me include works in Sanskrit as well as in the standard, literary, especially poetic, dialects of our mother tongues) and the folk mythologies that exist in the substandard, not necessarily rural, nonliterate dialects, those motherliest of mother-tongue dialects. If we may call the motifs, characters like Rama or Surya, and episodes like those between Siva and Parvati or between Parvati and the demon, *signifiers* and call the meanings they carry for the natives their *signified*, I'd like to propose at least four different, rather obvious, relations between the Sanskritic and the folk mythologies. Epics and Puranas are not distinguished here.

Examples for 1 in table 5.1 are the major avatars that both the Sanskritic texts and the folk texts share; for 2, the figures of Siva and Parvati who appear in both texts, but with different functions, episodes, and so forth, or in new avatars not found in the Sanskritic texts; for 3, Madappa's journey as narrated above, which shares neither signifier nor signified (though abstracted patterns may be similar); for 4, Madappa's killing the demon king, where the signifier is new but the signified is shared with many of the myths of Siva and Visnu.

Folk mythologies relate to Sanskritic ones in all four ways. They also relate in a fifth way, that is, they garble what they retell, a process that goes both ways, in both kinds of texts, to delight and frustrate scholars, giving rise both to new myths and to new scholarly papers.





Table 5.1 Relations between Sanskritic and Folk Elements

| SIGNIFIERS | SIGNIFIED |
|---|---|
| 1 same | same |
| 2 same | different |
| 3 different | different |
| 4 different | same |

In taking the same gods and heroes as in the Sanskritic Epics and Puranas and making them do, say, and mean different things in a local milieu, the folk myths *domesticate* them, *incorporate* them in bodies that sweat, stink, defecate, and menstruate (which their Puranic counterparts usually don't, with a few notable exceptions, like Parvati making Ganesa out of her body dirt), *localize* them, and often *contemporize* them. As I've written of these processes elsewhere, 4 I shall cite just one example.

Ramanathapura is a place in Hassan district, Karnataka. People tell the following story about it: when Rama and Laksmana wandered in the southern forests in the hot season, they couldn't find any water to bathe in. They were covered with dirt and Rama positively stank to high heaven. When they came near this place, the villagers said, "O, that Rama, he really stinks!" But they also showed him their little stream, in which Rama bathed and came out clean, even fragrant. He left all his stench in the stream. So that place was called "Sriramanathapura." In Sanskrit, it means, "the town of Rama's lord," but in Kannada it means, "the town of Rama's stink." In Kannada, *natha* means "stink, (bad) smell." In this bilingual pun, we see the way the Rama story is localized, de-Sanskritized, made earthy and corporeal.

Folk myths also extend the common stock of well-known Puranic incidents in hundreds of ways. To give just one example: after the Churning of the Ocean, the sweat and dirt of the laboring gods and anti-gods muddied the waters and made it dark and salty. The dismayed Lord of Oceans came to Visnu with a complaint. Visnu gave him a boonthat sea water would look dark only at a distance and would be crystal clear in the hand. Such a story connects a daily perception with a mythic incidentas the Sanskritic Puranas themselves do very often. Such etiological myths that explain why something is what it iswhy dogs copulate in public and get teased





for it, why cats hide their faeces, why the chipmunk has three stripes, why the sky is so high (all because of mythic events)give us a pervasive mythology of ordinary life. This process is the obverse of domesticating the Puranic myths, but the result is the same-connecting a myth set in the past with a mundane event in the present. Such connections are made in

all three semiotic modes: the symbolic, the iconic, and the indexical, in Charles Peirce's terms. Localizations as in the Ramanathapura story make an *indexical* connection, for the place is the context for the incident. An example of the *iconic* would be why the onion is taboo for Vaisnavas: because one cross section of an onion is like the conch of Visnu and another cross section is like his discus. Another charming story illustrates the *symbolic*: Draupadi didn't want her husband Bhima ever to forget her sorrow when they lived incognito in Virata's court. So she prayed to Krsna who created onions and threw them into Bhima's kitchen. Every time he peeled an onion, he would remember Draupadi; his eyes would burn and keep his revenge alive. Folk or false etymologies (false from the point of linguistic inquiry), again a favorite feature of Sanskritic myths, connect a language item or a place name to a mythic event, for example, the etymology for Ramanathapura.

In many of the features, the folk myths are similar to the Sanskritic or "classical" Puranic mythsexcept that we see them not in texts but in everyday speech, in a collective yet diachronic process, the stories being varied, reworked, etymologized, informed, or garbled by successive tellersnot really different, indeed, from the variant Puranic texts themselves, except that in the latter the variation is not as variable and the process is arrested by the fixation of texts.

Out of such shifting materials, such *sancari* (changing) motifs, a *sthayi* (relatively stable) folk Purana crystallizes around a charismatic figure, a combination of hero, saint, and god, who claims miracles, collects devotees, asserts power over evil, becomes the center of a cult in a locale. Puranas, whether Sanskritic or folk, differ from other texts. They've been called "mosaics" (Bonazzoli). To know a work of Kalidasa is to know his exact words. But few Hindus, if any, know a Purana as a whole text; they just know the stories. They fit Levi-Strauss's description of myths as stories that survive translation (unlike poetry which, according to Frost, is what gets lost). Like most Hindus, for instance, I know the details of the avatars of Visnu, but I do not know the *Visnu Purana*. (I've argued elsewhere 5 that the Epics are similarly held in Hindu memories, though parts of mother-tongue texts tend to be remembered verbatim, especially if they are considered sacred, like Tulasi's *Ramacaritamanasa*.





Among the Puranas, the *Bhagavata* may be among the exceptions.) In spite of repeated efforts to impose schemes and canons on them from time to time, Puranas are open systems. In Tamil, the *Kanta Puranam* is called "*kantal puranam*," meaning a Purana of *kante* or *kantal*, of rags, of "shreds and patches." I recently found references to Christ, Moses, the Messiah, Noah, and Queen Victoria in the appropriately up-to-date *Bhavisya Purana. Pura navam bhavati*, says an old *Nirukta* commentarythe old becomes new, exactly like any folk text. One may go further and say that in such texts as the Puranas (as suggested above, the difference in range of variation between Sanskritic written ones and the oral folk Puranas is only a matter of degree) we see clearly and in extreme forms the nature of all texts, particularly Indian texts. We have been reminded in the last few years by text theory that

> any text is a new tissue of past citations. Bits of codes, formulae, rhythmic models, fragments of social languages, etc., pass into the text and are redistributed within it, and there is always language before and around the text. Intertextuality, the condition of any text whatsoever, cannot of course be reduced to a problem of sources or influences; the intertext is a general field of anonymous formulae whose origin can scarcely ever be located; of unconscious or automatic quotations, given without quotation marks. 6

Folk texts, especially, never let you forget the intertextual nature of all texts. It also helps to see the many narrative genres of a cultural unit (family, caste, village, and so forth) in relation to each other in a kind of ecological array of genres: folktales and folk myths, texts in mother tongues and in Sanskrit (and other father tongues), oral and written in their fixed and fluid forms (for both oral and written have both), and so on. Furthermore, motifs, structures, and whole narratives may move through different genres and acquire different properties and meanings according to the ambience of each genre. Contrary to one of the early principles of transformational grammar, we need to assert that meaning is *not* constant under transformations. Each text has to be read for itself and in context to get its meanings. Texts cannot predict contexts, structures cannot predict functions, nor motifs and types meanings. Archetypes are empty unless cultures, by which I mean subcultures, fill them.

In the light of all these remarks, I'd like briefly to characterize folk-Puranas and present a section from *Maleya Madesvara*.

Folk Puranas in Kannada are distinguished from other folk narratives by the following characteristics:

1. They are sung, maintained, and learned according to certain ritual prescriptions by a group of specialists devoted to a specific god and initiated by, and raised to perform, special observances.

2. A musical instrument symbolic (or iconic or indexical) of the god is used in the singing/chanting/reciting of the Purana, usually in a group with foreground (*mummela*) and background (*himmela*) performers. When not in use, these instruments are worshipped at the god's altar.

3. These Puranas are performed on special days (pilgrimages and occasions) and in places sacred to the god.

4. These narratives are long, several nights long. They contain chanted prose, verse, song, and refrains. They are segmented in *salu* or line, and *kava(t)lu* or branch (section). *Salu* represents a night's or two nights' worth of narrative; *kavalu* is a substory, a shorter narrative within the main one, not a unit of time. No single teller (to our knowledge) sings all of them, though he may know of them. Of the fourteen *salus* of *Madesvara*, collected by P. K. Rajasekhara from nearly twenty singers in 1973, few singers knew more than a couple. In a sense the entire folk Purana is known in detail only to a folklorist, who is a modern Vyasa. Folklore in its natural state has Sutas or reciters, but no Vyasas or editors.

5. Like the Sanskritic Puranas, the story begins with a creation myth (certainly the two major Kannada Puranas do)though one can find them also without such creation myths. They also contain a series of "etiological" episodes that explain the names and epithets of the god/hero/saint (for he is all three), the holy places he visited, destroyed, blessed, or cursed. The crisscross wanderings of the hero thus map his country, inscribing telltale traces of his miracles, wars, stratagems, and so forth on places, many of them ending in the conversion of unwilling or arrogant people into devotees. 7

6. One last point: in terms of Sanskritic Epics and Puranas, folklore in general, and folk Puranas in particular, present an alternative world; they are what we may call "counter-texts" to their better-known "classical" analogues. They may use (see earlier discussion of table 5.1) many of the same characters, motifs, and so on (as Purana experts will immediately recognize) but counter and invert them and give them new meanings. I shall present the opening creation myth from *Madesvara*, to convey the style and tone of the Purana. Then I shall suggest a few ways in which the folk Purana uses and inverts classical motifs.



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A Creation Myth in a Folk Purana

Adisakti came into being
three days before earth, heaven,
and the netherworld
came into being,

three days before Brahma, Visnu,
and Siva.

As time passed, she attained puberty.
She looked at the sky
and said, "Ahha, nothing in sight
to satisfy my passion,
to please my youth.
I've to (be)get one myself,"

and gave birth
to Brahma.

When Brahma was born,
four faces and eight hands,
she said to him: "My boy, do you know
why I've brought you into the world?
I'm young and need a man
to satisfy me.

Look at me and be my husband.
I'll give you all my arts
and the world will be yours."

Brahma heard what his mother said
and let out four sighs.
"Mother, you bring me into the world
and ask me to be your
husband.
Would that be right? You are my mother."

"Che, idiot," she said.
"Is it for this I got you?
Burn then
for your disobedience."
So saying,
she placed her hand on his head.



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Her hand had an eye of fire
and it burned him to ashes.

"I created this four-faced creature
to take care of my youth, but he wouldn't.
We'll have to get a new one," said she,
and on the second day
she (be)got Ma'Isnu (Mahavisnu).

He looked beautiful to her, even better
than the four-faced one.
Her youth overflowed and she giggled
and giggled with pleasure.

Ma'Isnu asked her,
"Mother, why do you laugh like that?"
She sat him next to her
and said lovingly, looking at his face:
"My man, do you know
why I've got you here?
I got one yesterday, but he wouldn't do
what I asked him to do.
I asked him to be my husband and satisfy me,
quench my youth's passion.
Let's live as if we are on the ocean
of milk, I said.
But he wouldn't look at me,
he talked back.
So I burned him to ashes.
I want you to look at me, be my husband
and quench my passion," said the Great Mother.

The hair on Ma'Isnu's body stood on end.
"What kind of new talk
is this?" he said. "Is this *dharma?*
You give birth to me and ask
me to look at you and be your husband.
In the world yet to come,

in that arrangement of things,
would the children born to the mother
go to the mother?"

The Great Mother said,





"Son, shouldn't a son go to the mother?"
Ma'Isnu knew all about this.
He said, "Children go to the mother
to drink her milk, to give her happiness.
Would they satisfy the passion of the mother
who bore them? Why did you beget me?
I can't look at you," he said.

She listened to Isnu.
Her youth makes her prance. Her eyes are full.
Her body is filling out like a bright yellow lemon.
She was now in a rage.
"Look, I got this fellow but he won't satisfy me.
Why should I let him live?
I'll burn him down
just like the other one," she said
and turned him to ashes.
All she had to do was to place her hand
with its eye of fire on his head and he went up
in flames.

By the third day,
brimming with youth
she couldn't bear it any more.
She thought, "Let's get a three-eyed one
for the third day.
What does it matter if he does not satisfy me?
Let's get a fellow
who will bring light to the world."

Saying that, with her *maya* [power of illusion]
she (be)got Siva.

"My boy," she said,
"I got you here to satisfy my youth,
to quench my passion.
I'll be yours, you be mine.
Be my husband
and give me pleasure."

"Mother, you didn't wait long
to say such good words, did you?
Do sons and mothers ever get together like that?





That's not right.
If that's right, *dharma* will be in ruins,

*karma* will increase.
No, mother,
this won't do.
I won't raise my eyes and look at you,"
said Madesvara [Siva].

Adisakti replied,
"If you and I don't live together
as husband and wife, the world will not sprout,
the dark that's around will not
clear up, and how will the world see light?
Where will children come
from and family life begin?
Don't talk like a coward now and ruin yourself.
Just listen to me and become my husband."

"I can't. I can't be your husband, mother,
and I don't want you
to be my wife.
If we live as husband and wife,
the Wishing Cow will give no milk,
mother earth will be stunted,
clouds won't gather and pour down rain,
the fire goddess will turn away,
the Ganges will vanish.
In the Kali Age yet to come,
those who say Siva will forget Siva,
those who say Hara will not know Hara.
*Linga*-lessheretics will rule the world,
darkness will shroud the world,
*dharma* will be in ruins, *karma* will swell. No, no,
I'll not look at you."

*"Shabash*, my son. You are young,
but your talk is neat.
You are clever, smooth; your words have color.
But don't you know I'm Adisakti?
All three gods are in my hands.
Fire, Ganges, gods, antigods,
the human race, are in these hands.
The world is entirely inside my heart.



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Who's greater than me?
My hands have the power to create
worlds, and the power to burn them down.
Look at me,
and satisfy me, cover my youth."

"Mother, are you the eldest, the greatest, in the world?"
"Yes, son, I'm Adisakti."
"Mother, if I don't become your husband, what will you do to
me?"
"I'll burn you down in a minute."
"Really?"
"Really. I got two more like you before you.

They refused to satisfy me,
said like you
that they wouldn't do that to me, their mother.
So I thought, Why should they grow up?
and I burned them to ashes."
He listened carefully.
He was born with long matted hair;
it cascaded down his forehead.
He gathered it up and tied it over his head.
The Great Mother's youth brimmed over.
He asked, "Mother, where are these fellows you burned down?"
"Not far from you. Turn around."

Madeva turned around and saw
two heaps of ash.
The hair on his body stood on end.
"She'll do the same to me," he thought,
and became wary.

"Mother, you are the greatest.
You got me so that I could be your husband.
Right? Don't you want to see me grow up
and become bigger than you?
Don't you think
the husband should be stronger than the wife?"

She agreed, made a pavilion for him
to grow up in and saw him grow.
Then she said, "My boy, I've helped you grow





from a little man to a big one.
You now look taller than me. Come now, satisfy me."

"Wait, wait a little, mother.
You've waited this long,
can't you wait just a little bit more?"

She was happy.
She thought, "Ahha, he will satisfy me."
She asked him, "What else do you want?"
"Mother, if you want me to be your husband,
shouldn't I the husband be stronger than the wife?
Teach me all your arts," said Madeva.

*"Shabash*, my son. I'll teach you all my arts
and make you powerful.
What do you want?
I can give birth, burn, create things."

"Mother, you give birth. You burn.
You make, you break.
If I have
to be your husband,
I must have at least a feather's worth more
than your powers."

She was amazed at his words.
She looked at the sky and then she said,
"But why do you want these powers?"
"Mother, if you want me to be your husband,
you must fill me with your energy
and enterprise.
I must light up the world.
I must darken the lighted world.
I must give birth to celestials, rear humans,
create goddesses like Mari, Durgi, and Chaudi,
three hundred million gods,
*gandharvas, yaksas, kinnaras*, Kali Makalis,
create earth, heaven,
and the netherworlds,
ten directions all around, sun and moon,
Indra and Narada, birds, demons, men,



---



and three crores of creatures
teach me to do all that."

"My boy, I've this ring on my hand.
All my power is in it.
If I take it off and lay it on the ground,
I'll not have the strength
to take a step.
And if I lose the eye of fire in my palm,
I'll have no life at all.
Let me keep my eye of fire.
Here, take my ring,
wear it, you'll see the universe
in this diamond," said she,
full of love and infatuation.

Siva learned all her arts from her,
Madesvara, lord with the eye
of fire.
He felt like laughing, but the mother didn't understand
his tricks.

"What else do you want to learn?" she asked.

"Amma, I'm expert in all the arts now.
I want to ask you something.
I have your *maya*, your arts, your powers.
Now who's greater, you or me?"

"My child, what does it matter
how many arts you've learned?
I'm the one who brought you forth, am I not
the one who gave you all
your powers?"

As she said it, he laughed aloud.

"You haven't lost
your high and mighty ways, mother.

Am I not greater than you now?
All your powers are in my hands."

"But my son, I am Adisakti, the source
of all those arts.





"Am I not then greater than you, my child?"

"Amma, then let's do something," said Madeva, our father.

"What's that?"

"Let's not argue. Let's see who is greater.
Let's dance," said he.
"If you and I face each other and dance,
your passion will increase.
When you overflow with it,
I'll be your mate."

"How will you do that?"

"Let's dance.
If you defeat me, if you win,
I'll be your husband."

*"Shabash*, that's my boy. Let's dance, as you wish."

"Let's get ready then, mother," said Madeva
and began to dance.

When he stamped his foot, so did she.
When he lifted a leg, so did she.
She did not see through
Madesvara's stratagem.
She danced
better than Madeva, harder and harder.
All she wanted was to defeat him.
Streams of sweat ran down her body.
Her hair longer than two arms came loose
like a haystack.
She had no care even for her modesty.
She danced and danced.

Then, as he was getting tired,
our father the wizard placed his own right hand
on his head.

She too forgetfully
placed her right hand on her head, and at once
she went up in flames, did the Great Mother.





Even as she burned, she came towards him saying,
"My son, I brought you forth,

but you are greater than me.
Take my eye of fire."
And she wanted to give him the Eye, but he thought,
"Adisakti will burn me down," and vanished,
Maker of Seven
Hills, the solitary one.

Adisakti was full of grief.
*"Ayyo!* With whom can I share
this sorrow?
O eye of fire, you go now
to my son's forehead and become his third eye,"
she cried.

Then, even as she turned to ash,
she cursed Siva:
"He refused a woman, so
may his body be stuck
with the very kind of female he refused."

Who knows what's first?
The seed, or is it the tree?
Only Madappa, Siva who is Adisakti,
only he knows.

In the next section or *kavatlu* (branch), Siva makes Brahma and Visnu rise from their ashes and tells them what he has done, how he has burned down Adisakti, and he shows them the heap of ash. They praise him as the first god of the world and embrace his feet.

Then Madeva said,
"We three are Brahma, Visnu, and Isvara,
the Three Gods of the world.
We have to create three million worlds,
three million gods, human beings, demons,
*kinnaras, yaksas,* Indras and Naradas,
eighty million beings, plants and trees
and tubers, and also the oceans.



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If all this is to be done,
we need women.
We must marry and rule our wives.
Kailasa, Vaikuntha, and Brahmaloka
are yet to be created.
Let's not throw
away the ashes of our mother,
but share it."

The three of them went and stood
before the ashes, now divided
into three heaps.
Siva held out the ring
that the Great Mother had given him
and placed it once on each of the heaps.

Out of them
rose three women:

Parvati who is Isnu's sister, Sarasvati
who is Siva's sister, Laksmi
who is Brahma's sister.
Siva married
the first,
Brahma married the second, and Isnu the third.

Then each said to the other,
"I've given my sister in marriage to you,
and married your sister.
We are brothers-in-law to each other
in more ways than one.
Let's create the worlds."

Then Siva created heaven and three paradises,
Vaikuntha, Brahmaloka, and Kailasa
the first for Isnu and Laksmi,
the second for Brahma and Sarasvati,
the third for Siva and Parvati.

In heaven, he created eighty(?) million beings, gods, men,
demons, birds, ants, chameleons, lizards, snakes, scorpions,
bushes, reeds, trees, plants, tubers.

Then our father the wizard





Madeva called all living beings and said to them,
"Children, you will not suffer
old age or death, you will not suffer hunger
or thirst.
One thing but: you should not eat the plants,
break the trees or pluck the fruit.
If you do, you'll be in trouble."

All the eighty
million creatures listened to him,
shook their heads in assent
and said,
"We'll do as you wish.
You are the lord of the world."

Among these eighty million,
there were cats and hens as well.
One day, when the hen laid an egg,
the snake looked at it
and wanted to eat it.

But he knew
that Siva had asked them to eat nothing.
"But I want to eat that egg," he said to himself
and went to the gods.
He tried to persuade them
to eat the grain, the plants and trees
and become strong.
But they were angry with him.
They drove him

away, saying, "This black snake
will not only ruin himself, he
will destroy all of us."

Then he went to where the demons
and humans were sitting around.
He called out to them. "People,
this is not fair:
We don't have the strength
that the gods have. If
we can eat the grain
and the leaves and the fruits here, we will
become strong.





That's why Siva has ordered us not to eat anything.
This is not good for us.
If we want more strength we must eat.
Siva too deceives.
Let's go against what he said,
and eat food."

The demons and men felt the desire to eat.
They began to pull off
and eat seeds, twigs, leaves, bark, and all.
The serpent devoured the egg.
They all made a mess of heaven.
It stank of dirt and shit.

Madeva became aware of the way
men and demons had become low beings.
He cursed them: "You widows' sons,
I gave you
no thirst, no hunger.
You went against my orders
and you have made heaven a dirty
stinking place.
You are not fit to live there."

He summoned Brahma and said,
"These demons and men have spoiled
heaven,
they have ravaged the plants and eaten them.
Let us move
them from there.
Create the earth and cast them down there."

The *raksasas* and human beings heard this
and came running.
They fell on his feet and pleaded.
"Lord, why do you want to throw us
out? It is not our fault.
It is all the fault of that snake
that's lying there."

Madeva said to Brahma, "Create a netherworld
and send that snake there."

Then the snake woke up and pleaded.





"Why are you sending me to
the netherworld?
I talked to them but they listened.
They are the ones who ate everything, and now
they are carrying tales against me."

Madeva said, "You can't escape punishment.
You can't say it isn't
your fault.
And I can't take back my curse.
I'll let you be in two
places,
in the netherworld and also round my neck."

Brahma created the earth and sent demons and humans
and many other beings there.
When the demons and humans grieved and cried
aloud, Siva said,
"People, if you remember me with devotion, and
behave yourselves, I'll protect you in times of trouble."

At the very end, a line of ants came to Siva.
"You are sending us
also to the earth.
All the other creatures are so big, but we are
so small.
What sin have we committed?
You must be fair, show us
the way."
Siva said, "Dear ants, that's what's given to you.
Don't ask for more. Ask for something else."
They said, "Lord,
the big creatures kill us
because we are so small.
Give our bodies
some poison.
Let there be a death every time we bite."
Siva got angry. "You sinners,
if I fill you with poison, will you
spare my world?
You've asked quite a boon.

All right, whenever you





bite anything, there will be a death,
yours!"

*Inversions*. In the Vedas and elsewhere, Brahma the creator lusts after his daughter. But here, the creator deity is female and she lusts after her sons. While in the other Puranas, the gods give their powers and weapons to the goddess, here it is the goddess who gives her powers and her eye of fire to Siva. (In other versions, e.g., in Telugu, she gives all three major gods

their insignia.)

In the story of Mohini and Bhasmasura, Visnu appears as a female dancer and tricks a demon into putting his own hand on his head, which act destroys him by his own power: he has received a boon from Siva that enables him to burn down anything by placing his hand on it. Here the genders are reversed: Siva plays the same trick on his mother.

In the Vedic Indrasatru story, Vrtra gets literally the boon he asks for and destroys himself. Vrtra wants to kill Indrasatru, which means "Indra the enemy" or "Indra's enemy," depending on the accent (the latter being himself); he puts the accent on the wrong syllable and is promptly destroyed. Here a very similar motif is employed to teach the ants a lesson.

One may go on, but I think I've said enough to suggest the way the folk Purana reworks motifs from the Puranic pool. The myth here, like other women-centered folk materials, also suggests a very feminine (even a feminist) view of the Hindu pantheon: the source of all creation was a woman, who is tricked out of her powers by her son, destroyed, divided, and domesticated into three lesser, docile, consort goddesses for the three gods, Visnu, Siva and Brahma. Though they refuse to sleep with their mother, refusing to break the incest taboo when she asks them to, they marry fragments of her once her powers are transferred to Siva and she herself is reduced to ashes. Out of her ashes, they remake three manageable wives. They marry their mother, but only after fragmenting her.

Lastly, one may note a Genesis-like story of a paradise lost through the cunning and disobedience of a snakethough, here, characteristically, there is no taboo on sex. Biblical motifs (spread, no doubt, by local missionaries preaching in the mother tongues) no less than the Puranic ones are part of the intertextual weave.





# 6
# Remaking a Purana:
# The Rescue of Gajendra in Potana's Telugu *Mahabhagavatamu*

*David Shulman*

Most famous, perhaps, of all South Indian Vaisnava *bhakti* texts, the *Bhagavata Purana* (ninth century?) embodies the mythology of Visnu as seen in medieval Tamil Nadu in deliberately classical, Sanskritic form. This Purana, whose roots have been shown to lie, in part, in the emotional *bhakti* of the Tamil Alvar poets, became one of the major vehicles by which this religious movement transcended its immediate historical environment and reached out to other areas of the subcontinent. Various aspects of the process that produced the *Bhagavata* and that involved transposing the Tamil theistic devotion of the Alvars into a somewhat archaic Sanskrit, replete with Vedic resonances, as well as into a Vedantic philosophical idiom, are by now relatively well known. 1 But the peculiar vision of the *Bhagavata Purana* went on developing in South India beyond the confines of even this most influential parent text. Later generations produced new versions of the *Bhagavata* in the regional languages, thus completing a historical circle: what began, with the Alvars, in the Tamil vernacular (a popular Tamil at that, as opposed to the baroque *kavya*-style Tamil of the Jainas from the period) eventually returned to the vernaculars in various altered forms, after a "detour" through the rarefied and prestigious medium of Sanskrit.2 One of the most beautiful and beloved of these later versions is the fifteenth-century Telugu *Bhagavatamu* of Bammera Po-





tana, rightly considered one of the classic achievements of medieval Andhra civilization.

We may observe something of Potana's stature and importance in stories told about his poem: when Potana refused to dedicate his work to a local king, Sarvajña Singama Nayudu, the latter took it from the author by force and buried it in the ground; the god Rama appeared in a dream to the king's wife and revealed that her family would be destroyed if the book were not returned; but when the palm leaves were dug up, portions of the text were found to have been ruined. Another version says that Potana hid the text himself in the shrine where he worshiped; only on his deathbed did he reveal its hiding place to his son, who again, on recovering the text, discovered large parts missing (destroyed by white ants). 3 These stories

seek to explain the fact that Potana's composition, as we have it, is incomplete; various sections are attributed to Veligandala Naraya and others, who are said to have filled in the missing portions after Potana's death. But the stories also bring the Telugu *Bhagavatamu* into line with the very widespread theme of the sacred text that is lost, damaged, andusually only partiallyrecovered.4 Such a career, indeed, appears to be a necessary attribute of sacred knowledge in South India; Potana thus becomes, in the eyes of the Telugu tradition, a member of a series of poets whose works bear the unmistakable imprint of the divine. One should also note the tension evident in the first story between the *bhakti-poet* and the king. Another well-known tale, built around a popular verse, relates that Sarasvati herself, the goddess of arts and learning, appeared to Potana and begged him, with tears in her eyes, not to sell her to a king in exchange for gold and land. As Velcheru Narayana Rao has suggested, we have here the traces of an important typological division in medieval Telugu between the "court poets" and the "temple poets," who chose to isolate themselves from royal patronage and all the consequences of contact with political power.5 Potana clearly belongs in the latter category; the invocatory verses at the beginning of each book (*skandha*) address his chosen deity, Rama, rather than any human king.6

We know only a few details about Potana himself. He was a Niyogi Brahmin, son of Kesana and Lakkamamba, brought up in an atmosphere of Saiva devotion. *Virabhadravijayamu*, a poetic reworking of an important Saiva myth, is also attributed to him. He ascribes his transition to a Vaisnava poetic vocation to merit accumulated in his former births (1.13). His precise dates and place of birth are still the subject of heated debate. The Telugu literary





tradition, with a fine intuition, makes him a contemporary of the great peripatetic poet Srinatha (early fifteenth century); we shall explore this linkage. We may also note that during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries Andhra witnessed intensive Vaisnava activity both in the great temple centers such as Ahobilam and Simhacalam 7 and outside them; although far too little is known about this phenomenon, this clearly formative period for Andhra Vaisnava institutions and intellectual development may have provided the essential context for Potana's work.

Traditional scholarship on Potana has often focused on two issues: (1) the narrative changes, elaborations, and occasional deletions the Telugu poet has made from his Sanskrit prototype and (2) Potana's occasional deviations from the strict classical norms of Telugu prosody.8 The latter issue need not concern us here, though we may note in passing that its resolution lies in Potana's close relation to the oral poetics of the folk tradition, which has left its impact on his diction and syntax and on the formal structure of many verses.9 But the first problem is based on an all-too-prevalent misunderstanding of the interrelationships of texts such as these, that is, a classical Sanskrit model and a "translation" or adaptation into one of the regional languages. Narrative innovations alone are often the least impressive transformations we find in studying these works. In fact, in Potana's case actual changes in the narrative structure, including the detailed progression of most individual narrative episodes, are relatively minimal; in retelling the stories, he has, on the whole, stuck closely to his Sanskrit text, often to the point of quoting whole phrases verbatim in the form of long Sanskrit compounds transposed, with the sole addition of a Telugu ending, to the Telugu verses. Such a practice is, indeed, normal in medieval Telugu. Nevertheless, despite this close verbal correspondence and even, on occasion, identity, Potana's verses breathe a rather different spirit from that of the Sanskrit originalthe spirit, no doubt, of fifteenth-century Andhra as well as of the idiosyncratic inner world of this particular poet. This is the miracle of transmutation, which we encounter regularly in Telugu versions of Sanskrit classics and which is particularly salient and powerful in the case of Potana. Minor changes on the level of plot are of little help in elucidating this process. Clearly, we need a more rigorous and wide-ranging approach to the problem, one based on more careful and sensitive readings of the relevant texts. The following pages attempt to develop such an approach with reference to a single episode, "releasing the elephant" (*gajendra-moksa*)one of the most popular in Po-





tana's *Bhagavatamu*and, at the same time, to relate the issue of textual transformation to the more general one of Purana making in late medieval South India.

## The Sanskrit *Bhagavata*: An Anomalous Purana

One part of our thesis may be stated briefly at the outset. Despite the formal features that align this text with the Purana corpus, despite its use of a conventional Purana-style framework, and despite its own declared intention and self-vision, the

Sanskrit *Bhagavata Purana* can only with some difficulty be fitted into the category of Purana, with its genre-specific norms. At best, it is a most atypical and unusual specimen of this class. Potana's Telugu work, on the other hand, for all its pronounced formal affinities with ornate poetic composition (*kavya*), is in fact a Purana of a particular, late medieval, South Indian type. It is customary to imagine a process by which, over the centuries, many individual Sanskrit Puranic passages or, indeed, whole books were transformed into Telugu *kavyas* or *prabandhas*, each with its author, its patron, its adoption of the elevated *prabandha* style. 10 But here we have a reverse instance: Potana has, in effect, created a Purana from a Sanskrit original of a rather different nature. To understand this process, we need to characterize the Sanskrit *Bhagavata* at least in its broad outlines.

Puranas are habitually defined by their contents: the *purana-pañcalaksana*, that is, the five main topics of primary creation (*sarga*), secondary creation (*pratisarga*), the genealogies of gods and sages (*vamsa*), history of the cosmic ages associated with the Manus (*manvantarani*), and the dynasties of human kings (*vamsanucarita*). In short, Puranas deal with the past, with old traditions (as the name *Purana* itself indicates) of what we would call "myth," and with a rather specific vision of what should, in fact, be called "history," however much it differs from traditional Western notions of what constitutes historical awareness. Though the material is always felt to be ancient, the Purana reformulates it in a new way: "What, though from long ago, becomes newthat is a Purana" (*purapi navam bhavati puranam*). This saying contains an important insight into the nature of the Puranic process, which is always a dynamic and transformative one; still, the traditional definitions do not suffice to illuminate the workings of the genre. Other formal features are generally presentfor example, the use of a frame in which one speaker, the Suta or, at times, a sage, answers the questions of his audience (usually the sages in the Naimisa Forest). The





dialoguewhich transpires on more than one axis, between speaker and listener but also frequently between different voices emerging, as it were, from within the main narratorfollows certain conventional patterns. 11 Early Puranas, especially the so-called Mahapuranas or Great Puranas, are also fairly heterogeneous, "agglutinative,"12 inclusive of an extremely wide range of materialsalthough much of it is assimilated to the specific semantic forms required by the genre.13 An overall drive toward ordering, arranging, integrating, and, especially, ranking and stabilizing values, ideas, and experience, is conspicuous in many exemplary works of the genre. Stylistically, Puranas tend to be couched in a relatively simple Sanskrit akin to that of the Epic and prefer the Epic *sloka* meter, although here, too, there is room for considerable variation.

Where does the *Bhagavata* stand in the light of these few, selected traits? It does present us with a great deal of traditional Puranic materials (including those of the *pañcalaksana* categories), and it definitely makes use of the dialogic frame: most of the text is narrated by the sage Suka, Vyasa's "lunatic" son, to King Pariksit as the latter sits by the Ganges and prepares for the death by snakebite that he knows to be his destiny.14 But already this dramatic, indeed melodramatic frame may suggest that we are dealing with a text with somewhat different emphases and goals than those of other Puranas. The "audience" here is literally situated between life and death, and the ultimate seriousness of the narrator's message is thereby powerfully heightened: his teaching constitutes the last words that Pariksit will hear, and the king's last hope to achieve salvation. Suka's teaching is also strikingly uniform in its effect: the give and take so typical of other Puranic dialogues has been largely replaced by a programmatic explication of the mythic materials in terms of a specific metaphysical reading of Vaisnava *bhakti*. We can define this orientation, at least in general terms, as a kind of theistic Advaita with strong yogic components.15 The stories presented by the text thus tend to be "explained" to us by the narrator as Visnu's "amusements" (*lila*) reflected in the distorting and illusionary mirror of *maya*, which is ultimately no different from the great god's true being, at rest in itself. As one might imagine, this metaphysical standpoint can create interesting tensions of its own in juxtaposition with the various mythic narratives that it seeks to elucidate; F. Hardy has aptly remarked: "It is difficult to imagine what kind of a person the author could have been, maintaining in himself this incredible tension between intense emotionalism and monistic and theistic illusionism. But however incongrous this enormous edifice may appear to us, it contains stimuli and inspiration which re-





mained operative for the following thousand years." 16 We will observe something of the dynamics of this peculiar combination, worked out in a striking and rather self-conscious manner, in the episode discussed below; and it should also be instructive to see how the Telugu version handles the apparent "incongruity" of its textual source.

The Bhagavata also stands apart from the rest of Sanskrit Puranic literature by virtue of its unique diction and style. As

many scholars have noted,17 the Bhagavata was composed in a strangely archaic Sanskrit, filled with Vedic vocabulary, verbal formulas and direct quotations from the Veda, and even obsolete Vedic morphemes; these features are integrated into an elevated and often somewhat difficult style that is, moreover, uniformly distributed throughout the text. The difference from the more usual Puranic Sanskrit is immediately apparent to anyone who reads even a few lines; the Bhagavata fails to justify the conventional literary bias against Puranas (kavitvahinah puranabhattah, "those devoid of poetic talent become composers of Puranas," in the words of a well-known verse).18 Hardy has also remarked on the relatively high distribution of classical lyric meters in this text (as opposed to the Epic sloka); he concludes that it is "beyond doubt that the BhP wants to be more than a simple epic narrative, viz. a kavya."19 Indeed, in many waysboth in individual passages and on the level of its general plan and tonethe Bhagavata seems closer to kavya than to Purana, and the striking unity of the text together with its unusual style would suggest that behind it lurks the figure of a single author (or, at most, a very small group of poets working together at a single historical time and place). Again, the contrast with the Sanskrit Mahapuranas is plain. Van Buitenen, in a seminal article,20 offered an explanation for the text's patently anachronistic, Vedicizing discourse in terms of its author's wish to secure Vedic, that is, orthodox legitimacy for the still insecure Vaisnava sectarian movement in the Tamil area.21 A similar motivation may underlie the attempt to translate Tamil bhakti religion into a somewhat alien Advaitic discourse.22 These strategies are also suited to the stage in the evolution of Tamil Srivaisnavism represented by the Bhagavata, a stage of far-reaching Brahminization and Sanskritization (from approximately the ninth century onward) that eventually crystallized in the systematic work of Nathamuni and the school of Yamuna.23

All of this adds up to a picture of the *Bhagavata*, historically one of the most popular of all Puranas, as, ironically, slightly out of place. Its striking homogeneity, its programmatic drive, its strained





containment of the Puranic dialogic structure, its *kavya*-like style, pace, and lyricism, the sense it conveys of a single hand at work in singular waysall set the *Bhagavata* apart from other Sanskrit Puranas. But the purpose of this compressed discussion, which naturally fails to do justice to the complexities of the *Bhagavata*'s poetics, is not to take issue with the Indian tradition's classification of what is, after all, a major text. Rather, our concern is to highlight the transformation that Potana has achieved and to analyze its main features by exploring the microcosm of one short but typical episode.

The Story of Gajendra: Bhagavata Purana 8.2-4

The story itself is an extremely simple one, so simple that one hesitates to dignify it with the name of mythit appears, in fact, to be only one step removed from a gnomic animal fable. It tells of the elephant Gajendra's long, losing battle with a crocodile, Gajendra's despair and plea for help, and Visnu's sudden appearance in the nick of time to save the elephant by slaying the crocodile. In strict narrative terms, that is all there is to it, although, as we shall see, the potential for a more complicated reading of the tale does exist. In any case, simplicity hardly precludes popularity: this is a deeply loved tale, whose explicit moral, if one is needed, is that of Visnu's easy accessibility (*saulabhya*) to his devotees in the hour of their need. Reciting the story is said to be an effective antidote to nightmares. 24

It is also much older than the *Bhagavata Purana*, though not represented in earlier Vaisnava texts such as the *Visnu Purana* and the *Harivamsa*;25 the Alvars cite it in their hymns.26 One hesitates to ascribe a date; there is a possible early iconographic representation on a carved pillar from Mathura (400-415 C.E.),27 and we must note the most famous of all such depictions, the Gupta panel from the early sixth century at Deogarh.28 This lovely relief shows Visnu appearing on Garuda to save Gajendra from the clutches of his tormentor, here somewhat surprisingly portrayed as a Naga (half-cobra deity) rising from the waters in devotional pose (no doubt as a result of the god's intervention). The story underwent continuous development in Vaisnava traditions: the *Brahmavaivarta Purana* makes Gajendra the source, through the action of Visnu, of Ganesa's elephant's head!29 The major Tamil Vaisnava shrine of Varadarajasvamin at Kancipuram assimilated the story to its local tradition,





identifying Varadaraja as Gajendra's savior. 30 Various medieval authors expanded upon the tale, particularly in South India: Raghunatha Nayaka of Tanjore (1614-33), the great poet-king, composed a Telugu dance-drama (*yaksagana*) on this theme.31 We may also note the prevalence of the general motif of the devouring crocodile, often identified with Death or Time, in South Indian literaturemost notably, perhaps, in the story of Cuntaramurttinayanar's successful resuscitation of a

Brahmin boy swallowed (two years earlier!) by a crocodile at Avinaci in the Konku region.32

Since our primary concern is with Potana, we will limit our discussion of the Sanskrit versions to that of *Bhagavata Purana* 8.2-4. This version may conveniently be divided into seven main segments:

1. Preliminary: linkage with the frame (8.1.27-33)

2. Setting the scene: the Trikuta Mountain and the elephants' play (8.2.1-26)

3. Gajendra's struggle with the crocodile (8.2.27-33)

4. Gajendra's impersonal prayer (8.3.1-29)

5. Visnu's intervention (8.3.30-8.4.2)

6. The karmic prehistory of the story (8.4.3-13)

7. *Phalasruti*: the rewards promised to those who hear or recite the tale (8.4.14-26)

Of the above, segments 2-5 provide the main field for Potana's development of the text. As will become evident, in some cases the Telugu poet elaborates a single Sanskrit verse or set of verses; we may thus delay close scrutiny of certain elements of the Sanskrit text to our next section, where they can be seen in conjunction with the Telugu material. At this point, let us briefly review the Sanskrit prototype as a whole.

*The Frame*

The eighth book (*skandha*) opens with a cosmo-historical sketch, suitably revised to incorporate the tones of Vaisnava yoga, of the first four Manus and their corresponding *manvantaras* (ages). Visnu/Hari was born during the fourth *manvantara* to Harimedhas and his wife Harini; it was this Hariso Suka informs Pariksit who saved the elephant Gajendra from the crocodile (*graha*). Parik-





sit, as usual, asks Suka to tell him the story he has just mentioneda story that is itself a form of merit and blessing (*sumahat punyam dhanyam svastyayanam subham*)at greater length.

*Setting the Scene*

Suka begins by describing a mountainTrikuta Mountain, with its three peaks of silver, iron, and gold, the radiance of its jewels, its luxurious trees and noisy waterfalls and pellucid pools. The rather prolix description, in *sloka* meter but bordering on an embellished *kavya* style, includes a lengthy list of the trees and creepers that graced one of the mountain valleys and of the birds at home in one of its clear lakesan oral-poetic survival in this elevated and Sanskritized milieu. 33 A somewhat pallid erotic tinge, derived from stereotypical landscape descriptions in the Sanskrit courtly *kavya* (e.g., canto 1 of *Kumarasambhava*), emerges in one or two verses: *kinnaras* and their *apsaras* lovers play in the mountain caves; breezes carry the fragrance of the streams in which divine women are bathing (2.8). In this wondrous setting, a great elephant in rut, the leader of a herd, roams about with his wives and children. There is a violent aspect to his appearance: the first verse to mention him (in *vamsastha* meter, carried through in *vamsamala* until the end of the chapter) depicts him crashing against trees and trampling clumps of reeds and bamboo (2.20); he is, moreover, a terror to all the terrifying jungle animalslions, other elephants, tigers, rhinoceros, great serpents, and so forth, who flee when they smell his presence. On the other hand, smaller animalswolves, boars, monkeys, hares, and otherslive peacefully and without fear beside him, because of his merciful nature (*anugraha*). We see something of this softer side of Gajendra as we watch him enter a pool fragrant with the pollen of golden lotuses and water lilies; after quenching his thirst and spraying himself with water, he gently and compassionately bathes his cows and children and brings them water to drink from his trunk. None of this may seem particularly pertinent to the main themes of the story, and one might even be tempted to dismiss it as so much extraneous "filling," were it not for the integral use that Potana makes of these initial scenes.

*The Struggle*

Gajendra, intoxicated by rut and under the sway of the Lord's befuddling *maya*, is unaware of approaching danger: a crocodile im-

pelled by fate seizes his foot. Gajendra strives valiantly to free himself, while his wives cry out piteously and the other male elephants vainly attempt to extricate him. Thus a thousand years go by, as the crocodile pulls the elephant deeper into the water, while Gajendra struggles back toward the bank. But the elephant's powers eventually begin to wane, and the crocodile, who is in his element, continues strong. At this point Gajendra, clearly an intelligent elephant, perceives the hopelessness of the struggle and the imminent danger to his life; he sums up the situation in two eloquent and important verses:

> These other elephants, my relatives, are unable to save me in my miseryhow much less so can my wives! Caught in destiny's snare embodied by this monster, I shall take refuge with the Supreme. There must be some god who protects a frightened person who turns to him from powerful Death, running after him like a vicious serpentI seek refuge with that god, whom Death himself flees in fear. (2.33-4)

Gajendra's words are heavy with familiar associations: the crocodile has become the snare (*pasa*)of fate and the terrible serpent, Death; the elephant turns for refuge (*prapatti*) 34 to the supreme god, who inspires even Death with fear. As Sridhara, most famous of the commentators on the *Bhagavata*, notes, this last attribute brings to mind Upanisadic statements about the Absolute (citing Taittiriya Upanisad 2.8.1.)as we might well expect from the *Bhagavata*'s program. The signal feature of this crucial moment of transition is, however, the impersonality of the god whose help Gajendra seeks: he is "some god" (*kascaneso*), the supreme goal (*param parayanam*), by no means identified yet by name or other attribute with the *Bhagavata*'s primary deity. This sets the stage for the *stotra*, the praise-poem to this impersonal Absolute, that now follows as the single largest unit of this episode.

*The Prayer*

As is so often the case in the *Bhagavata* (and, indeed, in other Puranas as well), this *stotra* seems at first to be only loosely linked to the narrative. We have an apparently autonomous segment of the text, guided by its own drives and concerns, embedded in a timeless moment within a story unfolding, as stories must, in time. On closer inspection, we can observe an essential semantic linkage that also helps to explain the relative length of this section and its function at





this juncture of the story. We shall see this element clearly at the conclusion of the *stotra*, that is, at the second seam uniting it to the narrative context.

I must confess that I have been unable to discover any organizing structure to the *stotra* as a unit. Thematically, it offers a reworking of largely Sankhya-Yoga terms and concepts, couched in pseudo-Vedic language, in the direction of what Hardy has called "intellectual *bhakti*." 35 Still, the impersonality of the deity addressed is carefully preserved throughout. Underlying the Sankhya terminology we detect the "extreme idealistic monism"36 ascribed to the *Bhagavata* by Dasgupta, although it is somewhat less clearly articulated here. In short, this is a *stotra* to the primary divine principle that subsumes all, conceived in relatively abstract and universal terms and described in stereotypical phrases drawn from Veda, Upanisads, and Sankhya-Yoga. To convey something of the poem's flavor, let us cite a few typical passages:

> 3.2. I pay homage to that Lord who is the source of the universe imbued with consciousness (*yata etad cidatmakam*); to Purusa, the primal seed (Sridhara: = *prakrti*), the supreme lord: thus I meditate (*abhidhimahi*, echoing the Gayatri *mantra, RV* 3.62.10!).37
> 3.5. When, through the power of time, all the worlds disappeared together with their guardians and all causes, there was (only) profound darkness (*tamas tadasid gahanam gabhiram*; cf. *RV* 10.129.1); he is the lord (*vibhu*) who reigned, shining, beyond it.
> 3.6. Gods and sages cannot discover his true place; his way is inscrutable, like that of an actor who moves through constantly changing forms.
> 3.8. He is without birth, karma, name and form, attributes or flaws, but he assumes all of these, at the proper time, through his maya in order to destroy and to create the world.

He is the Witness (3.10), lord of complete detachment, the joyful experience of *nirvana* (3.11), master of the field, root of

the *atman* (3.13), true being reflected in the false images of form and matter (3.14), ocean of all Veda and Agama (3.15), release itself, compassionate, free, "capable of freeing from their fetters souls like me who turn to him" (3.17). He cannot be attained by those who remain attached to themselves, their children, friends, houses, wealth, or other people (3.18). Those who concentrate solely on him, who have turned to the lord, joyfully sing his amazing and auspicious story





(3.20an isolated hint in this context of the other active pole of the *Bhagavata*'s devotional world). He is the supreme, imperishable *brahman*, unmanifest (*avyakta*; = *prakrti*?), reached through yoga, beyond the senses, very subtle, very remote, infinite (3.21). He is not god or demon, human or animal, not male, female, or eunuch, neither existent nor nonexistent (*sat/asat*); he is what is left when all else is denied (3.25).

And so onthe consistent tenor of the hymn should be clear. We will return to individual statements below in connection with Potana's reworking. But we must conclude this precis with the verse carrying the main thrust of Gajendra's plea to the remote and hidden Absolute that he has just described: "I have no wish to live this life, born from an elephant's womb, shrouded from within and from without; I seek release from all that veils the light of the spirit and that cannot be removed just by the passing of time" (3.25). It is a beautiful request, beautifully stated, and it immediately lifts Gajendra out of his helpless struggle with the crocodile into an entirely new plane of feeling: his concern is no longer with one, violent, imminent death in the pool but with the whole unhappy round of existence. More than any other, perhaps, this verse justifies the common title given this episode by the tradition*Gajendramoksa* (Gajendra's Release). All the more striking, then, is the fact that it has no parallel in the Telugu version.

*The Intervention*

This is the turning point of the story: Visnu appears in response to Gajendra's prayer, on Garuda, with the discus in his hand. But the transition here is most telling: "When Brahma and the other gods, completely identified each with his distinct, individual traits (*vividhalingabhidabhimanah*), failed to come toward Gajendra, who had just described God as without any specific characteristics, then Hari, who comprises within him all the other deities, revealed himselffor he is the inner being of all" (3.30). This verse links the *stotra* to the continuation of the narrative, and one sees at once how it turns the impersonality of the hymn to good effect, using it to illuminate one of the central messages of the *Bhagavata*. The hymn and Visnu's response now demonstrate this Purana's program: Gajendra, not knowing which god to address by name and attribute, sings to the unqualified and nameless Absolute, whichor, rather, "who"flies to his aid in the form of that one god who, alone, is that Absolute. The moral is stated unambiguously and self-consciously. Brahma and the other gods belong to another, lower





level of being, a level of obsession with ego-identities that enslave and delude them; Visnu is All, Being itself, but Being uniquely embodied in this singular, visionary form. Moreover, as such, hearing himself addressed as such, he arrives to save the helpless victim who has called to him anonymously. Like the *Bhagavata* poet, Visnu knows himself as the Absolute; knows, too, and accepts the devotee's demand for help from this absolute source. The long *stotra* leads into a metaphysical statement of direct relevance to the story's development. Yet this seam between the two segments of the story we are studying retains a certain tension, bordering on paradox, that informs the explicit messagefor the move from the abstract claims of the *stotra* to the god's dramatic intervention in his standard iconic or mythic form is a progression from a somewhat detached monistic illusionism to a context of concrete emotional immediacy. Visnu, in confirming his ultimate identity as *brahman*, seems almost to leap beyond the Advaitic premises of this equation into a world that is all too real, all too saturated with terror.

In any case, upon his arrival, Gajendra can now identify his savior by name: "Narayana, universal guru, Lord," he cries in recognition, raising his trunk toward the god; the latter lifts both elephant and crocodile out of the pond and beheads the crocodile with his discus. "Thus Hari delivered Gajendra before the eyes of the gods" (3.33). The usual precipitation of heavenly flowers follows on schedule.

*The Prehistory*

What Puranic story is limited to a single lifetime? Both crocodile and elephant were living out their past. The crocodile had

once been a *gandharva* named Huhu, who was cursed by the sage Devala to assume this form. Released from the curse by being slain by Visnu, he bows and returns to his own world. Gajendra, for his part, had been Indradyumna, the Pandya king and ruler of the Dravida land, 38 a great devotee of Visnu whose very devotion had caused him trouble. Once the sage Agastya had visited the king while the latter was immersed in worshiping the deity and vowed to silence; since Indradyumna failed thus to honor the sage, Agastya cursed him to suffer darkness (in the form of an elephant, stubborn as he wasthus Sridhara). Although birth as an elephant normally destroys memory, Gajendra, by virtue of worshiping Hari, retained his (4.12).39 Now, at the touch of the lord's hand, Gajendra is freednot simply from the crocodile, but from the fetters of ignorance (4.6); he





acquires the form of Visnu, with golden garments and four arms, and joins the god's retinue.

One might imagine that the text is articulating an interesting conflict in this karmic excursus. After all, the Pandya king was only following the constantly reiterated recommendation of the *Bhagavata* itselfto give oneself over to unrelenting *bhakti* that largely closes off the rest of the worldyet his devotion was rewarded by Agastya's curse, a seemingly clear-cut case of undeserved suffering. In fact, the text pays no attention whatsoever to this conflict. Its vision is directed toward the final, happy ending, which makes it all seem worthwhile: even a thousand years of battling a crocodile, to say nothing of the general state of becoming an elephant, are a small price to pay for what Gajendra eventually achieves. Passages such as this can easily convey the impression that the *Bhagavata* presents us with a world without evil, since in the end every figure in the text is related to the god in a devotional pose of one type or another (including, of course, the by no means ineffective hostile relationships)and that is what counts. 40 This view has much to commend it. Nevertheless, the *Bhagavata* does have its own theory of evil as well as a sensitivity and empathy for intense suffering, as one can see, for example, in the horrific book 11. This is not the place to pursue this problem in detail; what emerges from the present example is a certain tendency to smooth the edges of potential conflict of this type, a tendency linked here to the suggestive theme of redemptive memory triumphing over the potential disaster of forgettingfor Gajendra, we are told earlier, carried the knowledge of his *stotra* over from his prior birth (3.1).

*The Reward*

The *phalasruti* has two parts, joined awkwardly together. First Suka, the narrator of the frame, assures Pariksit that this story brings divine splendor, an end to the evils of the Kali Age, and release from nightmares to all who hear it. Then Visnu magically reappears to announce to Gajendra that whoever remembers him, that is, Visnu, or Gajendra, or the mountain or pool where this story took place, or a long list of other sacred items, will be freed from all evil; those who praise the god with this story will receive pure knowledge from him at the moment of their death. Note, once again, the emphasis on memory and its saving power.

Such are the essentials of the Gajendra story in this Sanskrit version. The actual narrative events are few and related with surprising economy; large parts of the text are taken up by the landscape





description, the concluding *phalasruti*, and the *stotra* that both forms its central core and helps to structure its key message. Let us now see how Potana works with this rich classical inheritance.

The Telugu Gajendra: Bringing the Story Home

As mentioned earlier, Potana follows his Sanskrit prototype very closely both in the basic units of the narrative structure and, to some extent, in verbal reproduction of elements drawn from the Sanskrit. We thus find the same progression of seven narrative segments that we have seen in the preceding section. Let us take them one by one.

*The Frame*

Suka begins with the fourth *manvantara*, in which Hari, that ocean of compassion (18), 41 saved Gajendra from mortal fear. Pariksit wants to hear more: any story in which Hari is mentioned is auspicious, to be listened to joyfully (21). This formulaic verse, repeated by the Suta to the sages, leads immediately to the opening description of Trikuta Mountain.

*The Scene*

Here we observe a considerable expansion: lyrical description of the story's setting and of the elephants' play takes up twenty-eight verses (23-50), including a long prose passage, as befits Potana's *campu* style, which imitates the list of trees and aquatic fauna in the Sanskrit text. But this is no mechanical reproduction of the model. The setting has come alive in a new manner closely linked to the semantic burdens of the text. First, the stature and energy of the elephants, especially Gajendra, are magnified through a string of hyperboles that enhance the dimensions of the dramatic struggle about to unfold: the elephants issue from the mountain caves like all the darkness of the world, emerging at nightfall after hiding all day from the sun's light (27); the young elephant calves playing on the hills are fearless, unwilling to give way before lions, mountains, even thunderbolts (28); the powerful movements of the elephants' trunks and rut-filled temples turn mountains upside down and cause the universe to tremble (36). Gajendra, spraying himself with water, scatters crocodiles and crabs from the pool into





the heavens, where they join the stars of the zodiac (47). The specificity of the natural setting is opened up and extended toward the limits of the Puranic mytho-cosmic map. But even more striking is the way in which the wilderness landscape is itself vitalized, eroticized, made sensually present with an immediacy never achieved by the Sanskrit text. If, as Pariksit assures us in the frame-introduction, this is a story about God, then the primary feature that captures our attention as we move into the story through these early verses is the sensual profusion of the setting the Telugu poet has created for his narrative. Visnu acts in the Telugu *Bhagavatamu* in a world that enchants and fascinates the senses:

> The body came alive
> at the touch of cool and gentle breezes,
> soaked with lotus scent;
> the wild geese who live on lotus fibers
> murmured their perfect speech,
> a celebration for the ears;
> the flowering water lilies and lotuses gave delight
> with their perfume
> while parched tongues revived
> with drops of limpid water
> sprayed from the waves;
> eyes rejoiced
> in a pristine radiance, new to the three worlds
>
> forgetting
> the daily working
> of all five senses,
> that herd of elephants in rut
> went down to the pond. (44)

Characteristically for Potana, still vitally connected to an oral-poetic medium, this verse is neatly and symmetrically divided, with a line for each of the senses; and, although the series is crowned with luminous vision, the more generalized sensations made present in the poem are olfactory and tactile, as we might expectespecially given the existential potency of smells in medieval South Indian culture. 42 This sensual quality is sustained throughout the entire episode, as we shall see.

And not without incorporating a strong erotic component (much more vivid and effective than in the isolated hints in the Sanskrit text): the beesso often markers of eroticism in Indian





poetrydrunk on the scent of the rut, which they are sipping with avid desire, vie with one another in bringing this delicacy to their female lovers (31); or the males nobly renounce their portion so that the females can enjoy it (33). The animal world is one of passion and, somewhat surprisingly, of mutual caring; it is also repeatedly and systematically correlated to female beauty. The grace of the elephants' walk exceeds that of young women; the full breasts of beautiful women hide within their

saris, "shamed" by the round fullness of the elephants' temples; women veil their thighs after noticing the superior charm of the elephants' trunks, and so on (40). 43 More explicit still is a prose passage that, in fact, concludes this entire, descriptive section, summarizing its overall tenor in a series of paronomastically phrased images: the splendor of that pool, disturbed by Gajendra's entry, was like that of a woman whose ornaments have been violently disordered by her passionate and skillful lover; the bees that are her dark curls have been scattered, her lotus-face is drained of nectar, the lovebirds that are her two round breasts have been shaken from their place, the sands that are her hips have been trodden in desire (50). The picture, in short, is of a beautiful woman exhausted after making love. Enter, into this eroticized and sensually vibrant setting, the brutal crocodile.

Before we turn to the battle section, however, we may draw out certain of the implications of the transformation we have witnessed so far. First, there are striking continuities with a much older South Indian tradition, one that affected the Sanskrit *Bhagavata* as wellthat of classical Tamil love poetry, known as the "inner" category, *akam*. To see something of the connection, observe the following verses:

> Tenderly, the great elephant offered grass from the pool or newly flowering branches, still bright with buds, to his wives, dear to him as his very life; with his huge ears, cool from the flowing rut, he stood and fanned them, dried their sweat; softly, with love, he caressed their delicate necks with his trunk.

This, of course, is still Potana (39); verbally and thematically, the verse adumbrates a later one, to which we shall come in due course. Here (also in v. 49) the poet is elaborating upon the far more condensed Sanskrit statement:

> The compassionate elephant, like a householder, bathed his cows and the young calves and gave them water to drink which he drew up for them with his trunk; but, intoxicated by rut,





> deluded by the *maya* of the lord, he failed to see the approaching danger. (2.26)

We have already cited the end of this verseand it is, perhaps, significant that the transition to the next, violent scene is embedded in the same context of the elephant's family idyll. The Tamil author of the Sanskrit *Bhagavata* may conceivably have drawn the image he uses from the corpus of classical love poetry, from examples such as the following:

> Tusks red and reeking
> from the tigers he has fought,
> pearls rustling at their base,
> an elephant caresses his mate and their calf
> with his long trunk,
> feeding them great mouthfuls of golden flowers
> from the honey-soaked, broken branches
> of the *venkai* tree on the hill,
> whose trunk he has smashed,
>
> here, in your father's
> wilderness,
> my love . . . 44

As with Potana, the motif of the caring elephant nurturing his wife and child belongs to the wilderness landscape of Tamil poetry; indeed, the wild setting clearly provides an effective contrast to the gentle solidarity displayed within the elephants' nuclear family.45 This is not the place to analyze the Tamil poem at length, although we may note in passing the striking combination of violent and gentle images. What does need to be emphasized is that Potana has not simply assimilated a familiar motif, which he then develops, on the basis of a single verse of his model, far beyond what we find in the latter text. The more important continuity is on the level of poetic technique. Consciously or not, Potana has refashioned the introductory descriptive section of the story in a manner reminiscent of the central principle of classical Tamil *akam* poetrythat of the suggestive correspondence of external, landscape features to an inner world of feeling and emotion.46 The lyrical and sensual portrayal of the Trikuta Mountain and its pool now points directly toward the mood and themes of the central narrative segments of the text. Gajendra's struggle transpires within a world of luxuriant, overpowering beauty, in a landscape of passion and, perhaps most

markedly, of loving tenderness. Liquid and mellifluous tones predominate both on the level of language and in the images the poet has selected. If something of this atmosphere already exists, *in nuce*, in the Sanskrit version, Potana has definitely given it far more vigorous and systematic expression. Moreover, we may suspect that the features we have outlined will be linked in the coming sections to the poet's underlying conceptions of divine modes of being and acting in the world.

*The Struggle*

I will not attempt to reproduce here the graphic and phono-aesthetic qualities of the battle scene. Suffice it to say that Potana again exceeds his prototype in both visual hyperboles and the powerful auditory effects he achieves. A long prose passage (55) shows us the two enemies struggling through their thousand-year contest, without food or sleep, alternating blows as night follows daylike two lions or two mountains entangled in hopeless conflict. We might pursue, for a moment, the leonine metaphor, which recurs in verse 62:

> He [the crocodile] leapt toward his temples
> like a lion,
> snarling, slashing at his feet,
> biting his neck, his back,
> snapping at his tail
> as if in play,
> pulverizing Gajendra's body,
> cracking his bones, his tusks,
> then falling back, only to strike again
>
> while waiting, always waiting
> for the right moment
> for the kill.

One cannot help wondering if the choice of words conveys a designated irony*hari*, the lion (both here and in v. 55) is also, of course, Visnu's name celebrated at the opening of the episode (21; see above). As if to sustain this possible double entendre, verse 65, at the very climax of the struggle, presents a further ambiguity:

> Like a mighty yogi
> who plants his feet on the ground,





> controls his breath,
> subdues the madness of his five senses
> and playfully, holding only to the power of the Supreme
> without sorrow,
> brings the creeping vine of wisdom
> to bloom
> the crocodile stood firm, holding fast
> to the elephant's foot.

The image of the lion, wholly absorbed by the crocodile in verse 62, seems to lead into other specifically Vaisnava associations: the crocodile now stands before us (*vikramiñcen*), somewhat surprisingly, like the yogi who triumphs over his body and the world. The verb is suggestive, a derivative of Visnu's classic root v*i-kram*, used to describe the god's ascent through the cosmos in the *Rg Veda* and his famous three steps (*vikrama*) as Vamana-Trivikrama in the Puranic myth of Bali and the Dwarf avatar. 47 Note that in the Sanskrit version of our episode, it is Gajendra who attracts this verb (*so 'tibalo vicakrame*, 2.27; cited above)a more natural association, perhaps, of the hero of the story with the deity who is to save him. In the Telugu text the root appears yet another time in the prose statement (64) immediately preceding the verse just quoted: the crocodile, fighting with immense power (*nirvakravikramambunan*), is like the darkness of delusion that extinguishes the lamp of understanding in the hearts of fools. So the yogic imagery works both ways, with the crocodile compared both to

the successful and heroic ascetic and to the darkness that the yogi strives againstand also perhaps, implicitly, to the yogi's god, celebrated by this Purana. In the hands of a more sophisticated and complex poet, these correspondences might take on a more significant load of suggestion: Visnu's relations with the crocodile, indeed with death and violence generally, could create the basis for a rather different mythic reading of the tale. It is almost as if the poet were recalling the Vedic description of Visnu as the "frightful beast wandering over the mountain, in whose three great steps all beings dwell" (*RV* 1.154.2). Were this the case, Visnu would appropriately be seen not simply as Gajendra's rescuer but also as the source of the mortal danger from which he needs to be rescued! Such a view would certainly be possible in other South Indian Vaisnava contextsone thinks of Kampan's Tamil *Ramayana*, for example48but in Potana's text we have no more than playful hints in this direction, hints neither sustained nor developed to any degree by the poet.





The yogic imagery recurs at the end of the battle scene; Potana, taking up a single word from the Sanskrit text*dehi*, the "living, embodied" elephant, seeing the danger to his life (8.2.31)gives it a metaphysical turn: the flagging Gajendra fights on "like the soul (*dehi kriya*), a prey to doubt, unable to release itself from the entangling creeper of delusion wound around its feet" (67). Note the theme of doubt, which finds still stronger expression in the *stotra*. We might expect from this image, which bridges the transition to the hymn, that the yoga-style "intellectual" *bhakti* so evident in the Sanskrit text will be repeated with only minor deviations in Potana's account. But it is precisely here that the Telugu text presents us with its most unexpected surprises.

*The Prayer*

First, listen to Gajendra's decision to call for help:

> Why hang on to false hopes? I can never fight this crocodile on equal terms . . . What deity should I imagine? To whom shall I call? Who might intervene for me and stop this crocodile? Are there no auspicious gods, aware of all that happens, who could hear the cry of the distressed? To such a god I bow. For a long time I was the honored leader of herds of elephants, lord to thousands of elephant-cows; why did I have to come here to this pool, instead of resting in the shade of sandal trees watered by my rut? What will be with this fear of mine, O lord? (70-72)

One is immediately struck by the utterly personal and familiar quality of this inner monologue, in obvious contrast to Gajendra's rather formal speech in the Sanskrit version. Potana has followed the Sanskrit's pointed reference to the existence of "some god" (*kascaneso*, discussed above) who could help; but this has become a negative rhetorical question, couched in colloquial syntax: "Are there no auspicious gods?" 49 Gajendra's entire existential stance vis-à-vis this important question is radically different from what we have seen in the Sanskrit *Bhagavata*, as the further progression of the hymn will show. It is also difficult not to smile at the tone of exasperation and mild self-reproach that this so very human elephant adopts at this critical momentwhy, after all, did he have to pick this particular pool? And then, at the very end of the verse, a real cry from the heart: "Lord, I am afraid." He is invoking a deity whom he desperately needs to be presentnot an abstract principle remembered from the learning of a former birth, as in the Sanskrit





model (although Potana also tells us in v. 70 that Gajendra is calling upon the divine wisdom that is the fruit of earlier merits).

After this personal and engaging beginning, Gajendra can now "revert" to the impersonal characterization of the god that we have seen to be the hallmark of his Sanskrit *stotra*. Many of the epithets he uses are lifted directly from the Sanskrit text: Gajendra bows to the god who externalizes the universe and reabsorbs it in himself, the flawless Witness, the *atman* (74), playfully embodied, like an actor in many forms (76) but without birth, flaws, forms, deeds, epithets, or attributes, beyond words, knowledge, and thought (78), quiescent, conscious of the bliss of release, lord of *nirvana*, the field-knower, ocean of compassion, the root of nature and the root of the *atman* (79), visualized by those who have burned their *karma* in the fire of yoga (80) but unattainable by those who remain attached to their sons, cattle, houses, and wives (81)and the god capable of suppressing the evil "of souls like me who have no other refuge" (81). All this and more is familiar to us from the Sanskrit source. But the most striking aspect of the Telugu version of the *stotrathe* element that makes it into a critical node of transformationis the fact that these tones cannot be sustained beyond a certain point. As if determined from within by the poet's most profound intuition, another voice makes itself heard in the midst of this high-flown metaphysical rhetoric. This

is a voice that speaks softly, intimately, with flowing feeling; that coaxes, teases, taunts; that comes alive only in a personalized relational mode.

> They say he exists
> wherever someone is in pain.
> They say he exists
> near all the greatest yogis.
> They say he exists
> everywhere in space.
>
> This one they say exists
> is he really there
> or not?
>
> He who has neither being nor nonbeing,
> whom I doubt
> won't he be there for me?
> He who acts to save good people
>   suffering from the wicked
> won't he act for me?





> He who sees those who see him
>   without using their eyes
> won't he see the trouble I'm in?
> He who hides himself,
>   but who knows when even fools cry to him
> won't he hear my cry?
>
> All forms are in his form,
> without beginning, middle, or end.
> He is near to his devotees
>   and to those who are in pain.
> Won't he hear me,
> see me,
> think of me,
> won't he come
> right away? (86-87)

It is difficult to convey in English the intimate pathos of the Telugu negatives: *vinade*, *cudade*, *talapade*, *vega rade*. Gajendra is speaking to someone close and beloved, someone he needs but whom he can also taunt with the simultaneously playful and pathetic notes of skepticism that suddenly emerge in these verses. This skeptical theme, which borders on a kind of emotional blackmail, intensifies as the passage progresses:

> Everyone knows you hear what people say,
> that you will go to the most inaccessible places
>   to help them,
> that, if they call to you,
> you'll call back: "I'm on my way!"
> everyone knows you see everything there is to see.
> Only I
> now have my doubts,
> great ocean of mercy! (91)

This verse follows a plaintive description of Gajendra's state: "My strength is failing, my courage gone, my body faint and weary; I know no one but you; shouldn't you forgive those who are in trouble?" (90). Clearly, the elephant knows whom he is addressingindeed, one has the distinct impression that he has known him all along, long before producing the impersonal

string of attributes at the start of the *stotra*. He has, in fact, visualized the god in his mind (89) and can now, in the final verse of the *stotra*, easily and naturally





call to him by name: "O Kamalaksa, 50 O Varada." And again, in conclusion, the sweetly intimate imperatives: "Won't you come now, have compassion; won't you remember me and save me?" (*rave, karunimpave, talapave, saranarthini nannu gavave*, 92).

The hymn has taken a rather different course from that "prescribed" for it by the Sanskrit original. Despite the wholesale borrowing of epithets and terms, we hardly recognize the model in its Telugu reproductionespecially as the poem of praise reaches its culmination. The entire atmosphere has been transformed: Gajendra now appears to have been praying from the start to a close, familiar, wholly personal, and concrete divinity, a divinity whom he knows by name and whom he identifies without apparent difficulty or dissonance with the abstract epithets of the Vedantic absolute. His use of Visnu's nameswhich would have been impossible in the Sanskrit *stotra*, given its investment in the impersonality of the elephant's addressmerely symbolizes and finalizes a process that has been implicitly present from the opening words of the hymn. In the Telugu text, Gajendra's god is anything but remote; he is here at hand, a specific, named presence both accessible and intimately known. Such, in any case, is the sense conveyed as we move through the *stotra* to its conclusion, which most patently illuminates the essential transformation Potana has achieved. For corresponding to this basic change in the poem's orientation is a palpable distinction in the poetic tones that Potana employs: the "borrowed," Advaita-laden verses are, in effect, poetic failures, a withered root somewhat artificially transplanted into the Telugu text from its model; the poem is quickened back to life only when Gajendra moves into the intimate mode of query and personal demand.

Thus, although the "moral" of the Sanskrit juxtaposition of impersonal stotra and concrete personal revelation is retained in the Telugu versionverse 94 tells us that Brahma and the other gods remained impassive in the face of the elephant's call, since they "do not comprise all," whereas Visnu, who is all, respondedits point has, in effect, been superseded by the whole thrust and tenor of the passage. The hymn has already "personalized" itself to an extreme degree. There is no shock of recognition, on Gajendra's part or that of the reader/listener, when Visnu appears on the scene; he, and only he, has been expected all along. In this way Potana smooths the problematic transition from *stotra* back to story and heals and harmonizes the disjunction that is so conspicuous (and so laden with meaning) in the Sanskrit original; at the same time, in failing to maintain the pretense of impersonality, with its consequent tensions, to the end of the hymn, he significantly reduces the role of the





*Bhagavata*'s Advaita metaphysics in the episode as a whole. Or, more precisely: the disjunction that largely generates the power of the Sanskrit hymn has here been transposed onto a different axis, suggestive of a different configuration of meanings. As we shall see, the atrophy of the Advaitic rationale is only one part of the change.

One should also note what is missing from the Telugu *stotra*. We have cited the verse that crowns the Sanskrit text, in which Gajendra suddenly shows himself to be primarily interested in release (*moksa*)and speaks contemptuously of his elephant's birth (8.3.25). There is no real parallel to this statement in the Telugu text. If anything, we feel that Gajendra wants to go on being an elephant, that what he fears is not the endless cycle of *samsara* but the tangible, immediate danger of the crocodile's teeth. This omission is consistent with the general transformation of the *stotra* in the direction noted, away from monistic illusionism and toward the familiar, the sensual, the concrete.

But the most interesting aspect of this transformationthe aspect that, in my view, lies at the very heart of the Telugu Purana's cognitive programremains to be defined. It is not merely a question of blunting the force of the Sanskrit text's Advaitic ideology, or of softening the transition evident there between the story and its metaphysical moral. The gap between these two existing elements has not simply disappeared without trace. Rather, out of the intimacy and personal familiarity of the Telugu prayer, a new and unexpected chasm has opened up. Gajendra, in his "pathetic" skeptical mode, delineates the edges of this no-man's-land: Is Visnu really there at all? Will he materialize in order to help his servant? Perhaps it is all a fantasy, this talk of rescue, a quixotic attempt on the part of the devotees to comfort themselves with a reassuring but unreliable promise of release from pain. Perhaps only the latter is truly "real." Not surprisingly, these questions and doubts, which Gajendra explicitly formulates, will have the effect of forcing the issue, moving the god to an action that will bridge the glaring gap. We may see them as a kind of riddling, reminiscent of the Vedic *brahmodya*, with Gajendra in the unlikely role

of the doubting (and motivating) Nastika. A new dynamism enters the poem at this point: the string of lifeless Advaitic epithets has ended up in a tantalizing empty space, an open gulf between devotee and deity that articulates, by its mere existence, an urgent demand. Movement is generated not out of certaintythe rationalizing metaphysics of the Sanskrit *stotra*but out of the blackmail and pathos of personal doubt.

That we stand here at a significant point of transition was





clearly recognized by the Telugu folk tradition, which tells us that Potana, having composed the verses quoted above, suddenly became stuck. Unable to proceed, he left his house for a walk. While he was out, Visnu himself took Potana's form, entered the house, and, before the eyes of Potana's daughter, completed the next verse himself. When the poet returned and, to his shock, found the new verse completed, his daughter asked him why he was surprisedhad he not composed it himself in her presence? The poet, realizing what had happened, marveled at this gift to his child, who had seen with her eyes the deity whom he, the poet, had served all his life. 51 The folktale sensitively reenacts the textual dynamics at this crucial juncture: as in the case of Gajendra, so with the poet, it is now up to the god to act in order to fill in the gap. The very conditions of intimacy, in both cases, have produced an open "nowhere" space riddled with uncertainty; this is the real space that the god inhabits and out of which he can, perhaps, be coaxed or driven to appear. Where the Sanskrit *Bhagavata* offers a clear-cut lesson, rationally defined and then enacted (but a lesson whose poetic force derives from a powerful disjunction), Potana, working in a mode of emotional and intuitive immediacy, restores something of the divine mystery and provides a technique for entering into itby letting Gajendra challenge the god with his doubt, in the tenderly sarcastic tones of the riddle.

*The Intervention*

The verse allegedly completed by Visnu takes us at once to the other side of the chasmto the god in his heaven, Vaikuntha, where he is busy arguing with, and also making love to, his wife Sri. From this point on, the story, moving to its conclusion, assumes the form of an endearing, subtly comical, divine coitus interruptus:

He didn't say a word to Sri,
didn't reach for his conch and discus,
didn't call to his retainers
or harness his bird,
didn't straighten the long hair that fell wildly about his ears,
didn't even let go
of the end of his wife's sari
that he had pulled from her breasts;
he simply rushed out, racing
to save that elephant's life. (96)





A prose passage characterizes the frenzied deity further:

> Thus Narayana, always intent on saving his devotees, who resides within the lotus-heart of every living being, hearing the elephant's piteous cries, restrained his passion for his lover, Laksmi; agitated, he scanned the four quarters of space (in search of Gajendra), since saving him was now his one overriding goal. (97)

Note the insistence on the god's indwelling in every creature in the context of his arrival, as it were from outside, to help his devotee. We now have a picturesque parade as the various inhabitants of Visnu's heavenfirst Sri, followed by the other women of the harem, Garuda, the god's personified weapons (the bow, Kaumodaki-club, conch, and discus), Narada, Visvaksena, and then everyone else, from children to cowherds (98)come rushing after him in disarray. But the poet's attention focuses on Sri, alluring, disheveled, awkwardly abandoned *in medias res*, her sari still dangling from the hand of her husband as he hastens away; her earrings are madly dancing, her hair hangs loose around her shoulders, her full and heavy breasts are exposed, the auspicious dot on her forehead has been smudged (102), andintensifying these images of

charming deshabilleshe is both curious and confused:

He didn't even say where he was going
did he hear some helpless women cry?
Have thieves made off with the Vedas?
Has the army of the demons invaded heaven?
Have evil people in mockery
asked his devotees, "Show us your Discus-bearing god!"? (100)

She hesitates to question her husbandin any case, he probably would not answer (103). But her various hypotheses have the effect of elevating Gajendra's story to the level of several well-known mythic situationsSomaka's theft of the Vedas, the recurring danger of demonic attack upon the gods, and, most suggestively, Hiranyakasipu's brutal and skeptical interrogation of his son, the devoted demon Prahlada. The latter reference is particularly striking, a kind of "internal framing" 52 of the tale, since the story of Prahlada and the Man-Lion avatar appears elsewhere in our text as one of its most powerful and elaborate episodes.53 The beautiful goddess, in her alarm, thus effectively transports the story beyond its immediate context, situating it on a continuum of self-consciously connected vignettes of the deity in



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his relations with the world (or with the dispersed parts of his self); she also unwittingly makes an important point for the audience, listening outside the story, a point never fully articulated in the Sanskrit prototype: Visnu will rush to the side of any devotee in distress with the same impetuous concern that he manifests in moments of crisis on a cosmic scale.

All of this is new, as are the tones of rich erotic commotion coloring the scene and the sensuous texture of the language used to describe the god's departure. Eroticism continues to inform the poet's imagery as Visnu arrives at the pool and throws his discus at the crocodile: the fiery discus plunges into the water as if it were the Sun, intent on making love to the Lotus Lady hidden in that lotus pond (111). This metaphorical Death-in-Love is instantaneously effected: the crocodile, still suffering illusions of victory, is instantly beheaded; Gajendra is saved, "like the mind of someone without desire and thus detached from the misery of *samsara*" (115)a rather mild recurrence, though at a climactic moment, of the yogic ideology more explicitly realized in the Sanskrit.

And, literally, a final touch: the god himself lifts the elephant up with his long arms and gently fondles him, wipes away the streaks of rut on his body, removes his sorrow. At the touch of Sri Hari's hand, all of Gajendra's pain disappears (118-19); and this moment of moving, tactile connection, almost palpably conveyed in the Telugu, continues for another verse, which gently concludes this section (and, in effect, the story as a whole) with a last, harmonious, tender scene harking back to the introductory lyric:

Lovingly, the cows caressed him,
alive by Hari's gift,
drawing near to him
to intertwine their trunks
once more
with his. (120) 54

We are back in the domestic atmosphere of verse 39, discussed above with reference to the single Sanskrit verse from which it departs and the still earlier Tamil *Cankam* motif of the jungle elephants' family solidarity. Verbally, too, the later verse echoes the earlier one; the initial harmonies of the Trikuta landscape, temporarily rent apart by the crocodile's attack, have been restored, the trauma healed, the hero returned to the bosom of his loving wivesby an equally loving deity. Not by accident, the tale proper ends with a double caress.



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*The Prehistory and the Reward*

The remaining verses (sections 6 and 7 of our division) follow the Sanskrit text with little variation. We learn the karmic conditions that helped to produce the story and the gifts to be gained by reciting it. There is a slight revision of the theme of

memory, which we saw to be important to the Sanskrit text: in a short dialogue with Sri, who has arrived breathless on the scene, the god declares that he forgets those who forget him, but remembers those who never forget this truth, and who call to him in their need (130). He asks his wife why she followed himwas it just to recover her sari? She answers in two beautiful verses:

Lord, what can I say?
My only task is to hold your feet
firmly in my heart . . .
It is only right that you
should hear the cry of the suffering,
that you should save them
and bless them,
for you, great god,
are in their power! (132-33)

The goddess offers another "moral," of a very different cast from what we saw in the Sanskrit version of the story: Visnu, the divine hero of the text, is not only close to his devotees, wholly familiar to them and accessible at any timehe is also actually within their power. The devotee, as we know from other South Indian traditions, can control the deity of his devotion; in offering love, the *bhakta* puts the recipient at a certain disadvantage (as is generally the case in the South Indian theory of the gift). 55 Here this notion is extended a step farther, so that it is the weak, the suffering, the distressed who activate this power over their god; he cannot but respond to their call. But Potana, unlike the Saiva poets, for example, shows no interest in developing this theme beyond the suggestive epithet he has chosen. His story is over: Visnu, appropriately, embraces the impassioned, bedraggled goddess and takes her home (134).

## Conclusion:
## A Soothing and Sensual Bhakti

It is time for us to sum up the major points of difference that have emerged from our comparison of the two texts. Ostensibly, the





Telugu text has reproduced its model with striking fidelity on many levels; in reality, we have been subtly but systematically transported into a rather different inner world. The means of transformation are primarily linked neither to the narrative itself nor to the explicit metaphysics that it conveys by literal, discursive statement; rather, they are embedded in the texture of the telling. The process is linguistic and stylistic, permeating the poet's choicesboth lexical and syntacticand consistently pushing him in a particular, characteristic direction. Let us try to define Potana's technique, with its specific semantics, linked to a specific vision of the divine in the world, by outlining a (somewhat abstracted) series of general features in relation to the Sanskrit "shadow"-text serving as model.

1. Potana's version of the Gajendra episode is softer, sweeter, more lyrical and liquid than the Sanskrit original. There is, so to speak, a significant semantic investment in the mellifluous. To some extent, this feature is, no doubt, an innate property of Telugu itself; but then there are Telugu poets (Tikkana, for example) about whom one could not make such a claim. Here gentle, flowing language embodies scenes of natural tenderness, both in the introductory landscape-lyric and in the climax of the story (the *stotra* and Visnu's intervention). For all the terror of the central battle scene, the overriding tones of the text are gently reassuring.

2. The language of the Telugu version is also far simpler and more accessible than the arcane Sanskrit of the *Bhagavata Purana*. No traces remain of the anachronistic Vedicism of the latter work. Potana's poem may be seen as a prime example of Telugu Puranic styleat least as popular and easily intelligible as Puranic Sanskritas we find it from the fourteenth century on.

3. The enveloping atmosphere, embodied with astonishing consistency in the poet's language, has changed in the direction of the sensual and the physically immediate and concreteand, of the senses involved, one feels the heightened role of the tactile. The story has acquired a near-tangible presence: the listener, no less than Gajendra himself, experiences the caressing touch of the god. In itself this effect represents a considerable triumph for the poet. Its roots lie, no doubt, in the Sanskrit original, with its introductory description of the luxuriant Trikuta setting; but Potana has maintained a sensual liveliness throughout the episode, including even the seemingly abstract and "intellectual" section of the *stotra*. Moreover, this quality

intensifies as the *stotra* reaches its culmination and Visnu enters the scene. The story transpires in a world made present to us, as the everyday world is, through our senses; the poet,





far from apologizing for such a world, enhances the immediacy of its impact with all the devices he has at hand.

4. A further step in this direction is the gentle eroticizing of the narration. Here Potana clearly transcends his source. We have seen this tendency in the initial landscape (suggestively employed to create a new sense of the dynamics of the episode as a whole) as well as in its most dramatic expression in the section dealing with the rescue (Sri's pursuit of her vanished lover; the erotic overtones of the crocodile's demise). Indeed, the effect lingers on even after the god's intervention, in the verse that reunites Gajendra with his wives. Note that this is, on the whole, a rather domestic eroticism, alive within the nuclear family (whether of the elephants or of Visnu and Sri). We are still a long way removed from the erotic immersion of, say, the Nayaka period poet Ksetrayya in the *krsnalila*. Potana's poetic eroticism is couched in a gentler mode, endowed with slightly comic touches, which does, however, presage the development of Telugu Vaisnava *bhakti* in Annamacarya and Ksetrayya.

5. The above features, together, have the conspicuous effect of healing the disjunction that gives the Sanskrit version something of its peculiar power. In general, the texture of the Telugu text seems to empty the Advaita metaphysics that it inherited of most of their force. In the context of so much sensual energy, it becomes harder and harder to maintain the seriousness of the *Bhagavata*'s illusionistic messageunless we are to imagine a kind of tactile Vedanta, not alienated from everyday physical sensation and thus opposed to the classic ideology of yoga (if not, perhaps, to certain Upanisadic presentations of *brahman)*. One hesitates to go so far as to assert that Potana merely pays lip service to the Advaitic explication so prominent in his source; but the strange incongruities of the Sanskrit *Bhagavata*, mentioned at the beginning of this essay, are definitely harmonized and reduced in its Telugu descendant. The tension which so enlivens the Sanskrit original, and which depends on the poetic and intellectual vitality of its metaphysical sections, has been defused in the Telugu poem; and the apparent unity which the Sanskrit text affirms by consistently "translating" its stories into a rational explanatory ideology is achieved in Potana on the level of texture, through the tactile, familiar language of his *bhakti*. The development we observed within the Telugu *stotra*, where abstract and impersonal perceptions give way, without dissonance, to more concrete and familiar tones, is a cogent indication of the direction of change. On the level of verbal technique, we have seen how Potana fuses the elements of his narrative, removing the visible seams of the prototype. More generally, we might see the harmonious soft-





ness of Potana's work as smoothing the problematic transitionor the riftbetween outside and inside.

6. Thematically, there are obvious consequences to this transformation. The explicit moral that we isolated in the SanskritVisnu's identification, at first unknown to Gajendra, with the Vedantic impersonal absoluteis exchanged in the Telugu text for a formulation of a different order entirely, one concerned with the god's dependence upon the suffering devotees who cry out to him. Similarly, the theme of release (*moksa)*Gajendra's ultimate releasehas lost something of its urgency; even if, in the end, the elephant acquires Visnu's form, this result is achieved not by a turning away from the world or by the god's gracious willingness to demonstrate his unique identification with *brahman* but by the endearing skeptical taunts with which Gajendra badgers him. There is no question any longer of the elephant's miraculous retention of his pre-elephantine memory, which offers unexpected hope for his release; now it is the god, very much alive in the world, who either remembers or deliberately forgets. On the whole, the ironies of disjunction that infuse the thematics of the Sanskrit Purana are either diminished or displaced (to the somewhat playful axis of the devotee and his god).

7. This process depends on a wider one of "bringing the story home." Perhaps the most signal new feature of the Telugu text is the familiarity and intimacy it establishes between Gajendra and Visnu (and also, to some extent, between Gajendra and the listenerfor the elephant has come alive to us in a new way that allows for empathy and identification). Gajendra speaks to the god with the knowledge of closeness, in tones appropriate for intimates, teasing him, prodding him, coaxing him to appear. Similarly, we hear the great goddess Sri adopt the speech and inner dialogue of a young bride, embarrassingly deserted by her husband in the midst of their passion. The figures of sacred tale stand before us as breathing, essentially human realities (whether incarnate as elephant or god). Potana strives for the very opposite of a Brechtian *Verfremdung* or Shklovskian *priyom ostraneniya*; he endows a grandiose, semi-mythic situation with familiar flesh, bones, and feeling. 56

Admittedly, this process is taken only to a certain point, by no means as far as in the South Indian folktale transformations of mythic or epic themes, of which A. K. Ramanujan and Stuart Blackburn have written.57 Potana's text is not a folk Purana. Rather, it is a Brahminic, regional adaptation of a classical Sanskrit text, which, as such, seeks to domesticate its materials in one specific, generally harmo-





nious mode. This type of "domestication" is not, as we shall see in a moment, the vernacular poet's only option.

8. Finally, perhaps underlying all the above features, there is a somewhat elusive and more intangible quality that pervades this text. We are clearly dealing not with a mere surface or formal transformation but with the emergence of a remarkably distinct and coherent universe of feeling. The change reflects a persistent quality that I shall call, with some hesitation, "innerness," and that corresponds precisely to what is perhaps the major message of this episode. We can sense this force in many waysin the gentle, flowing tones so evident throughout; in the intimacy of the discourse, especially at the critical node when Gajendra addresses his god; in the soft sensuality that ultimately replaces abstract and impersonal metaphysics; in the explicit emphasis, at the very moment of Visnu's appearance before Gajendra, on the god's existence within the living soul; in the harmonization of outer and inner realms of which we have spoken, and which contrasts with the apparent discontinuities of discourse in the Sanskrit *Bhagavata*; in the domestic "at-homeness" of the story, and its draining away of tension; in the use of the external landscape scenes, at the outset of this episode, to suggest an inner world of emotion, as in classical Tamil *akam* poetics. If, following A. K. Ramanujan, we transpose the ancient Tamil opposition of inner (*akam*) and outer (*puram*) to the textual continuum of a later period, 58 then Potana has moved away from *puram* toward an *akam* mode very much his own, in which the inner quality is specifically correlated to the other features we have mentioned (softening, harmonizing, domesticating, sensual expressivity, and so on). Perhaps the most striking element in this move is the fact that the essential message of the textthat of the god's proximity, familiarity, immediate availability, his being, as it were, as close to us as our innermost, most intimately sensed realityis, in fact, enacted by the texture, the entire linguistic creation, of the narration. Potana's language is to us as Potana's god is to Gajendra. It is not only syntax that contains, reflects, and effects the representation of reality, as Auerbach has shown in his classic study;59 the Telugu text of the *Bhagavatamu* realizes a coherent, specific vision through its texture.

How does this considerable transformation relate to the issue of composing a Purana in fifteenth-century Andhra? Before answering this question, it is important to observe that we are dealing with a distinct type of *bhakti*distinct not only from





that of the Sanskrit *Bhagavata* but also to some extent from what we see in the Tamil Alvars and Nayanmars. Potana depicts a relation between the devotee and his god that is ultimately harmonious, soothing, realized through sensual media, dependably close and constantin short, devoid of tension and alienation. It may include skeptical tones, it certainly does not preclude suffering; but, all in all, it suggests a relationship nicely stated by the Tamil Nayanar, Tiruñanacampantar:

> Whenever my heart is peaceful [literally, "cool"],
> I turn to you in joy. 60

Of course, the Nayanar's heart is by no means always "cool"; Tamil *bhakti* from the early, formative period (seventh century to ninth century) is filled with harsh, conflicted tones. One of the Tamil Saiva poets, Cuntaramurtti, even specializes in just such an angry, anguished, often alienated mode. Others, too, such as Nammalvar, feel tormented by their god's absence (*viraha*), to which they respond with urgent longing.61 And this is precisely the contrast with Potana's *bhakti* as seen in the Gajendra episode, which celebrates, above all, the god's closeness and palpable presence. The Sanskrit *Bhagavata* alleviates the agonies of *viraha* by measured doses of Advaita illusionism: thus, in the tenth book (the heart of this Purana, describing Krsna's birth and youth), Krsna reassures the lovelorn *gopis* through the mouth of Uddhava: "As the inner soul of all, I am never truly separated from you. .. I am removed from your sight only in order to bring your hearts near to me through meditation; women dwell more on an absent than a present lover" (10.47.29, 3435). Amazingly, the *gopis* are even said to be convinced and comforted by this reasoning (10.47.53)! Some of it, as we have seen, is retained in the Telugu text, but there the more profound development takes place on another level. The Advaita preachings are subordinated to the familiar and sensual re-presentation of the deity, whose absence has thereby lost much of its sting. Thus even one of the most famous *viraha* passages of the tenth book, the "Bee Songs" (*bhramara gitalu*) modeled on 10.47.12-21,62 although couched

in language clearly dependent on the Sanskrit verses, no longer conveys the same intense hopelessness at the god's unpredictable games of hide-and-seek with his lovers. The passage has become, as the poet states, a playful figure of speech (10.14.53). This illustration follows the general pattern we have been observingtwo texts sharing, in part, the same words, with the same literal meaning; only a relatively minor adjustment, in several of the verses, of order and





syntaxand yet, in the end, two different worlds. But Potana's reworking of the Krsna story in book 10 is the subject for a separate and longer study.

In short, Potana presents us with a kind of *bhakti* that, in contrast with the early Tamil sources, is at once "emotional," open to the senses, but not rooted in separation. There is, however, an even stronger contrast, closer to home, from within the Telugu tradition itself. Potana's Purana belongs to a period of Brahminic reaction against the militant *bhakti* of the Virasaiva poets such as Palkuriki Somanatha, author of the twelfth-century *Basavapuranamu*. The *Basavapuranamu* is a violent and angry work, 63 and much of the violence in which it delights emerges out of the complex relations between the devotees and their deity. Here it is not unusual for the fanatical devotee to excommunicate his own god, or to abuse him verbally, or to vow never to let Siva win against him, even in a dream! And yet this text, too, often "domesticates" the deity, brings him into the realm of the familiar, of the household and family relations. There is, for example, Bejjamahadevi, who decides to become Siva's mother (and thus to cure him of his unkempt appearance and extravagant habits); she is stubborn enough to force the god in his temple image to accept her decision and to nurse at her breast.64 This is only one example out of many. But one can sense even from this simple summary that the Virasaiva experiments with "domestication" follow a different logic from Potana's, a logic of ironic intimacy, rich in subtle tensions (between god, symbol, devotee). A large gap divides this antinomian, heterodox Virasaiva Purana from the symbolic and semantic universe of the fifteenth-century Brahminic Puranic texts.

Thus when Srinatha, Potana's contemporary in the eyes of the tradition, composed his *Haravilasamua* Brahminized and Puranicized version of Saiva materials drawn, in part, from the *Basavapuranamuhe* followed a path similar to Potana's. The story of Ciruttondanambi (Tamil Ciruttontar)one of the most gruesome of South Indian Saiva myths, in which the devotee is made to kill and cook his own son for Siva's dinner65appears in the *Basavapuranamu* in appropriately lurid form; Srinatha, even while verbally appropriating parts of that text (as Potana does from the *Bhagavata*), manages to refashion the story in a shockingly calm and harmonious direction. We are familiar by now with this kind of transformation, which is even more extreme in Srinatha's case. The tradition rightly associates these two fifteenth-century poets; for all their differences, which are substantial, both are part of a more general process of Purana making in Andhra. In both cases we can see





mechanisms of adaptation and assimilation that bring diverse materials into conformity with the late medieval, vernacular Puranic structure. Moreover, this Purana making is itself one of the major diagnostic signs of a wider process of rearticulating the Brahminic order in post-Kakatiya Andhra. This wider process is still poorly understood, although we can see certain important featuresthe redrawing of the cultural boundaries by deliberately excluding challengers such as the Virasaivas, a process always accompanied by the assimilation of texts and concepts and by their transformation; the political situation of diffusion and fragmentation, pressure from the Muslim power of the Deccan, and a concomitant cultural shift toward the paddy-growing centers of coastal Andhra, with their Brahmin settlements (*agraharas*)although Potana himself belongs to Telangana; the creation of a new, regional sacred geography structured around the great Brahminic shrines, which now produce Telugu Puranas giving classical form to their local mythology and cult (here again we find Srinatha active as the author of the *Bhimesvarapuranamu*, on Daksarama); the internalization, both institutional and intellectual, of the Tamil *bhakti* inheritance (both Tenkalai and Vatakalai Vaisnavism were vigorously propagated in Andhra from the late fourteenth century) and the production of a new theological literature of *bhakti* in Sanskrit (Vallabhacarya, fifteenth century). Clearly, in this essay we have been looking at the tip of the icebergat the refraction of a much more profound movement of social and intellectual reorganization in the tonality and semantics of a single prominent text. This movement remains to be studied in detail; for now, we may complete our analysis of one microcosmic epitome by summarizing those features of textual transformation in Potana that are directly relevant to the crystallization of the fifteenth-century Brahminic Telugu Purana. 66

Unlike the Sanskrit *Bhagavata*, and utterly unlike the Virasaiva hagiography, Potana's Purana harmonizes, unifies, defuses tension and disjunction (while still allowing for their presence on some level, e.g., in the survival of illusionist rhetoric in

the context of sensual and emotional *bhakti)*;67 it domesticates and makes familiar, though in a manner distinct from that of the Saiva poets; it simplifies language, softens contours, soothes us with its particular brand of devotion to a present, accessible deity; it absorbs the listener into the text through identification with the audience within the dialogic frame (thus making the story immediately present and also wreaking havoc with the listener's everyday orientation in time);68 it reduces irony and dissonance, integrating and assimilating diverse voices within a single subsuming order; and it ranks and





hierarchizes the elements it thus incorporates and that it seeks throughout to organize and arrangein this case with reference to the poet's primary vision of a personal and intimately experienced god. The apparent incongruity of Advaita Absolute and concrete mythic embodiment gives way in Potana to a hierarchy that "rises" inwards, stabilizing the perceived universe from this projected inner center, which is identified with the wholly personalized and present god. The drive to order and define in this manner fits well into the general Puranic pattern (in Sanskrit as well as the regional languages); the striking difference here is that the poet has produced this Puranic order not out of folk or other disparate materialsas is more often the case in this periodbut rather from a classical Sanskrit text that purports to be, despite its unusual character, a "Great Purana" itself.









# 7
# Information and TransformationTwo Faces of the *Puranas*

*Friedhelm Hardy*

One of the lesser known Jesuit missionaries who worked in South India during the late sixteenth century and early seventeenth century was the Portuguese Gonçalo Fernandes Trancoso (1541-1621). In a period of intense interest in "adaptation," namely, evolving a life-style in conformity with Brahmin values, he composed (during 1616 in Maturai) a treatise on "Hinduism" as a contribution to this discussion. Naturally the emphasis is initially on how Brahmins are supposed to behave; but eventually he does turn to matters of belief: "the things Brahmins are obliged to confess and to profess about the creator of the universe." 1 Without much ado he provides under this heading an account of "two Puranas of Suta,"2 and in the subsequent section he tells us "what about the same matter is said in the Purana which they call *Brahmanda Purana*, in its first chapter."3 Obviously a religious life without definite views on the creation of the world, and its creator, is unthinkable to our Jesuit missionary. We can imagine him, during his many years in South India, importuning his Brahmin informants with these matters so central to his native view of religion. When he then provides altogether four4 different accounts of the Hindu creator and of creation, as the outcome of his researches, we may well sense a feeling of frustration at this apparent lack of interest in a fixed doctrinal system. But for the moment I would like to draw attention to the





social setting: here is a man interested in religious matters who asks the learned men of South Indian society: who created the universe? And they reply:

> When all the *rsi*s were performing a sacrifice which lasted for twelve years, a disciple of the *rsi* Vyasa arrived, whom they called Romaharsana (which is to say: a man who by means of the extraordinary ancient stories he narrates causes the hair to stand on end) . . . And all the rsis gathered around the said Suta Romaharsana with intense desire to listen to many stories, surrounding him on all sides . . . Then they spoke to him: "You have heard from the mouth of the sage Vyasa the ancient stories about the gods, due to which you know everything . . . Please tell us some ancient stories about the gods." 5

While the Jesuit missionary asks a theological question, he is given passages from the Puranas in reply. Not only that: the Puranas themselves duplicate the question-and-answer situation, with the *rsi*s consulting Suta.

> These *rsi*s spoke to him [when he had narrated various ancient stories]: "Those Puranas speak equally about Brahma, Visnu, Rudra, the Sun, the Moon, the Fire and the Wind. This being soabout whom among them should we say that he is the creator of the world? For were we to say that all of them are the creators of the world, nothing could be created and nothing could be done, since one will always oppose another and each will want to create different thingsand we do see that the things of this world derive from one single design. . ." To this Suta replied . . . 6

Thus not just the external situation of question and answer is duplicated but also the great variety of possible answers. It is precisely this variety that puzzled the *rsi*s, just as it must have confused Father Fernandes. Now in the answer that Suta provides we hear:

> He who is regarded as universal lord must possess a very cheerful appearance and must be splendid like the sun and the moon; he must not be born and must not die. Finding himself without a world, he created it, and in conformity with [their] merits and demerits created the noble and ignoble castes [*castas*] and made all other things: he abides in the heart of allsuch a one will be the lord of the universe.7



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This now introduces a rational element into the seemingly random narration of the "ancient stories": somewhere it all has to make sense, and criteria for this making sense are provided. And this is obviously what our missionary wants: a rational basis for discussion.

That such a view of the Puranas is not self-evident can be shown from the writings of another missionary. The oft-quoted Abbé Dubois states:

> To Vyasa is also attributed the authorship of the eighteen Puranas. These are eighteen poems, all equally futile, containing most minute accounts of Hindu mythology with its gods and heroes. The fables contained in them are responsible for the gross forms of idolatry practised by the Hindus. 8

No wonder then that the same author, when talking about beliefs, ignores the puranic discussion and makes up his own theology around the concept of the *trimurti*.9

> In short, we find in the Hindu books [Puranas] a mere tissue of contradictions relating to the *Trimurti*, and the absurd details which are related in connexion with each are even more inconsistent. The point on which they agree to a certain extent is that which relates to the excesses and abominable amours of the three divinities composing it.10

What has been my purpose in exploring these perceptions of the Puranas presented by two missionaries? My intention has been to extricate from all this a conceptual framework, with the help of which it might be possible to attempt something like a global exploration of this literary genre. The points I would like to abstract from the observations made so far are as follows. First, the "ancient stories" are not random products of some over-fertile imagination; they function in a specific social contextthe question-answer situation as providers of information desired by a particular kind of intellectual curiosity. Second, an element of critical self-awareness, coupled with a decidedly rational approach, appears in the stories themselves. Taking both points together, one could venture a characterisation of the Puranas as providing, through a rational interpretation of past events, information (and that is the same as meaning or significance) for a present situation in the form of stories.

So what is novel or useful in this? For exampleto mention here first a random minor detailthis kind of characterization al-



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lows us to solve a formal dilemma, something that has given a bad headache to the text-historical scholars. When we open a book that presents itself as the *x-Purana*, for many pages we encounter people asking someone about that same *x-Purana*. And only when, say, two cantos' worth of episodes have been told, does the actual "text" begin. But in view of the program suggested here, these introductory two books need not be discarded as "later interpolations." They can in fact be regarded as

information about a particular social context that acts as the intellectual constraint upon the ancient stories as told in later portions of the text. This frame and all the subsequent interruptions in the narration are essential for the self-understanding of the Puranas as traditionally handed down discussions.

Much more important than such a formal matter is the problem of interpreting the stories themselves. The program suggested here would not treat them in isolation (or line up similar ones for comparative purposes) but would explore the significance of such a story individually in relation to a specific intellectual (that is, rational) discussionour question-answer situation.

To link the interpretation of Puranic material with some external constraint is nothing new. For instance Rösel, in a very idiosyncratic and provocative piece, reflects on the local myths he collected in Puri. 11

> My servant reported that every time when he met a different priest at the Rohini-Well, he was told a different story about its sanctity. Length and ornamentation of the individual story varied according to the amount of Dakhina paid. This last remark I consider the really decisive one. In the following analysis of the stories, the reader must constantly keep in mind the situational aspect. To tell stories is one of the most essential services provided by the Pandas [temple priests in Puri]. The form of the story told by them now depends on two things: the wish of the priest to provide as much entertainment as possible, and not to allow his colleagues and rivals to find out about his version of the story.

It is clear from my previous remarks on intellectual context that I would prefer to trace a less cynical line of constraints on Puranic storytelling than Rösel does. But when he remarks, obviously with reference specifically to the situation in the temple of Puri, that "stories are not literary objects, but social processes" and that "the individual temple, shrine or tree becomes valuable to the pilgrim only through a meaning-imbuing story,"12 this is in full





agreement with the conceptual framework pursued here. By now we are clearly moving away from an understanding of the Puranas as definite literary works, in the direction of situationally controlled oral processes and their individual literary expression. 13

This kind of story is thus not an objective, fixed entity: it is an element in a live event. Consisting of innumerable individual situations, this process imposes many different constraints on the narration of a story. This in turn means that even when a variety of such stories can be recognized as "essentially the same story," the variation itself is a controlled affair. In other words, the Puranas do not just provide a fixed type of immmutable information but transform their raw material in the process. At least indirectly the texts themselves acknowledge this by referring us, through sometimes very lengthy strings of narrators who tell what they heard from other previous narrators, to some primordial storytelling event, and by having different individuals pick up the same story. Moreover, the whole process is labelled *smrti*transmission through memory. However, *this* aspect of transformation will not be central to my discussion; instead, another aspect has to be unravelled upon which the emphasis will lie. The question-answer situation, which is assumed here as the primary context of Puranic narrative, tends to imply that he who provides the answer (by drawing on the primordial story material) is in some sense authoritative. This creates no problem as long as the information he provides refers to something that lies outside the questioner's own miniature cosmos. However, the question could well concern something known by, directly relevant to, and already in some form meaningful for, the person asking the question. Given the authoritative status of the narrator, it now becomes possible that the kind of answer given actually reinterprets, namely, transforms, the view of the world held by the questioner. In other words, Puranic narrative becomes ideological.

Let me summarize the program as it has emerged so far. I propose to look at the production of Puranic stories as a process aimed at providing information desired in specific contexts by means of a specific literary form. Provided that this process carries on as a live affair, it has a definite historical dimension, in that the story material undergoes transformation, and an ideological aspect, in that the specific story might transform a previously held worldview.

This now implies that what is presented here as the Puranic process has to be envisaged as operating on two levels. On the one hand we have a continuous production of literary textsthe fall-out products of the processcrystallizing in written form as the *x-Pur-*

*ana*. At this point the text may develop a history of its own (through interpolations and so forth) or may become totally ritualized. 14 On the other hand, the live process of narrating Puranic stories continues in accordance with its central premise: to provide continuously meaningful information for specific situations.

What is the purpose of this exercise? My intention in setting up this kind of conceptual framework under the banner of the two key ideas of information and transformation is to investigate to what extent it allows us to bring together disparate material in the enormous field of Puranic literature. The degree of insight it might yield into the nature of this literature will depend on the range that can be accommodated.

The two faces mentioned in the subtitle of this paper imply no exclusivity. The Indianist needs no reminding of Brahma's four or five faces or of Skanda's six, or Ravana's ten! Thus I would not claim that the present exploration of the constraints upon individual Puranic narratives is essential in all contexts. To treat the stories in their own right, comparing different versions, listing various recurrent themes and motifs, exploring deeper levels of symbolismall these are possible further faces. To provide entertainment or to allow the narrator to make a living similarly are further constraints not directly connected with the function of imbuing meaning. My aim here is to emphasize the rational, historical, and social dimensions, in order to counteract judgements and implicit assumptions that Puranic materials are "irrational," "contradictory," "meaningless," or "merely expressions of the subconscious" (or even, for that matter, ahistorical and immutable primordial mystical insights).15

Let me now apply my program to some concrete material. I shall start with fairly straightforward examples of Puranas providing information in particular situational contexts. Inevitably I choose as a starting point the area I am personally most familiar with, the South Indian Vaisnava temples.16 The pilgrim to a particular temple is faced with a great variety of specific features, which, by themselves or by comparison with similar items in other temples, arouse his curiosity: How did Visnu get here? What are the special virtues of this locality? Why is milk used in the daily *puja?* Why is the god called "thief"? These and many more questions are in the minds of the curious, and the *pujari*s, as part of their job, along with the (Sanskrit) *sthalapuranas* and the more modern Tamil adaptations of the latter, provide the answers. Inevitably this will be given in the form of a story referring to a past event. But at the same time, the information provided thereby is more than merely factual: it wants to imbue the present, in that particular situation and often





with reference to other Vaisnava or even Saivite or Devi temples, with religious meaning and thereby to stimulate devotion. A randomly chosen example (from the *Nathan-kovil-mahatmya*) may illustrate this.

When Indra was fighting with Vrtra, Vrtra began to win. Indra in despair approached King Sibi, who was famous for the protection he offered to those who sought refuge with him. Promptly Sibi set out to fight with Vrtra and managed to kill him. The gods gratefully offered him a boon, but when he chose liberation, they had to confess that that was a gift they were unable to make. Instead they directed him to the town of Srinivasa, where Visnu was residing as Nandinatha. Under a pipal tree to the west of the temple, he engaged in worship. After a hundred years Visnu indeed turned the temple round, so that he himself and the entrance door now faced west, to grant Sibi the fulfilment of his desire.

"Factually" this story explains why the statue is facing west (unusual by comparison with other Visnu temples) and why Visnu here is looking at Sibi (all temples have statues of one or more sages, kings, etc., who are looking at the main *arca*). In addition, the past event is meant to illustrate that powerful grace abides here; consequently the text adds: "And looking at Nandinatha and circumambulating him, even sinners can find here freedom from their evil (*papa*)how much more can the virtuous expect here!" (III, 52).

What it is that triggers off curiosity and questions varies enormously with the individual text and context. Essential in any case are: an explanation of which circumstances made Visnu settle permanently in the place, how he acquired his local name, and whom he is facing (*pratyaksam*). However, this mode of providing meaning for concrete features can go much further than commenting on isolated items. Sometimes very complex structures, incorporating dozens of such features in one overall coherent narrative, are created; in the case of large and famous temples like Srirangam and Venkatam, the items may be counted in the hundreds.

We may ask whether this is a way of understanding reality that is totally at variance with our own. We might pride ourselves that we would choose a "historical" explanation instead. So let us turn to the following example, namely, the

*sthalapurana* of TirukKannamankai. The actual narrative jumps backwards and forwards in time, through various emboxed stories. But when we plot the events narrated on a time scale, we realize that a logically coherent historical sequence of causes and effects is presented here.

In the Krta Age, the central lotus pond (*puskarini*) arose in the print left by Vamana's big toe in the earth, filled with the water from





Brahma's vessel. This lake then revealed its extraordinary powers by purifying Candra after he had committed adultery. It then attracted Brahmi, the sage Markandeya, and Kasinatha Siva. After the churning of the ocean, when Laksmi had fallen desperately in love with Visnu, she settled here to perform *tapas* in order to obtain him as her husband. Visnu arrived here in his celestial chariot (*vimana*) and gratified her desires by marrying her. Brahma asked them to abide permanently in the place, and Siva took on various forms to protect the territory (*ksetra*). In the next Age, Pururavas performed a sacrifice here and recited Visnu's names; Bhrgu worshipped here during the following Age. Finally, in the last Age, King Candavarma [and with him we might be dealing with resonances of history] bathed here and purified himself from the crime of drinking alcohol in a prostitute's house.

Thus, at least in principle, a historical mode of thought is also implied in this type of Puranic material. The ancient stories told are definitely perceived as referring to real historical events; 17 thus I prefer to use "story" here and not "myth." To use "myth" prejudges the whole issue, quite apart from the fact that this would force us into a scholastic discussion of how to define "myth." For our purposes it is sufficient to talk about information derived from past (that is, historically perceived) events for the present.

But it is not just the temple that appears as a situational constraint upon the story. When the merchant Samadhi and King Suratha had found refuge in a hermitage from the tribulations of their worldly lives, and the sage had offered them an interpretation of their personal situation by reference to the all-pervasive activities of Mahamaya (the Great Power of Illusion), the king asked: "Who is that goddess you call Mahamaya?"18 This should be characterized as a theological question; yet the answer is provided through the three well-known stories in which she allows Visnu to kill Madhu and Kaitabha and she herself kills Mahisa and Nisumbha. What the goddess did in the past defines her nature, and a religious world is opened for Samadhi and Suratha in which they find the fulfilment of their own ambitions.

How much further can we pursue this? It would obviously be highly interesting to see whether this Puranic mode of providing information is typically Hindu or not. Well, it is not. With only one small modification we can describe Jaina and Buddhist material within our present conceptual framework. This modification consists in a far greater emphasis on a series of past lives firmly concatenated through the rational laws of *karma*.

Such a Jaina participation in the Puranic process may serve





merely to interpret traditional Hindu material through a Jaina model. So we hear (in the Jaina *Kahakosu*) how Brahma acquired his five heads: He was doing *tapas* in order to win worship among humans; an *apsaras* named Tilottama was sent to destroy his store of energy, and while she was moving about in her dance, Brahma grew heads in all directionsthe one facing upwards being that of a donkey. This Hindu story is told to show "that even mighty beings like Brahma are ruined by attachment to women" 19 (a point of view shared by Hindus and Jainas). Another story tells us how, as a result of the *tapas* performed by Rohini, the Yamuna river chose a different course and is now flowing north of Mathura.20

A story21 about Kartikeya, in the same corpus is more complicated. Disgusted at being the son of his own grandfather (Agni), he turned ascetic. Rain created a lake around him when he was performing *tapas*, and "anybody bathing in it has his diseases destroyed."22 Later he met his sister and was suspected of incest with her by her husband, who wounded him mortally. Since he died with an attitude of forgiveness, "he who worships him gains merit (*punya*)."23 His sister was thrown into a state of utter depression at the death of her brother. Her husband tried in various ways to console her but succeeded only when he had a folk-actor impersonate Kartikeya so that his wife could talk to him. "From that time originates the festival of *bhauai*."24 Thus three features are explained here: the origin of Kartikeya worship; the sanctity of a particular [unspecified] lake; and the custom of celebrating annually the festival (called *bhaiyaduj* or *bhaiduj* in Hindi and *bhaubij* in

Marathi) to which a married woman invites her brother and treats him lavishly with food and presents. Now a comparison with a Sanskrit parallel version25 reveals that these three specific explanations are absent there, which suggests that this particular reading of the story of Kartikeya is original to the author of the *Kahakosu*.

So far our examples have dealt with material of Hindu origin. But typically Jaina stories can be used equally well in this manner. Thus the *Karakandacariü* tells us that during a military expedition King Karakandu (a famous *pratyekabuddha* of Jaina legend) arrived at a particular Jaina temple. Various peculiarities aroused his curiosity, and a sage whom he questioned narrated to him past events about the place that can be regarded as a *sthalapurana* of Terapura.26

Buddhist literature also illustrates our Puranic process. To demonstrate this I turn to the *Mahavastu*, a Mahasanghika work from India that belongs to the Lokottara tradition. Its bulk deals with a partial life-story of the Buddha. Various incidents in his life



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aroused the curiosity of the disciples of the Buddha, and he narrated "past stories" (*jatakas*) to demonstrate how the present circumstances make perfect sense in view of former events. For example: Why is Yasodhara so fastidious and difficult to satisfy? Now Jatakas are narrated to show how this is a consequence of events that transpired during past existences of Yasodhara. A comparison of these Jatakas with the corresponding ones in the Pali tradition reveals that there they are told in a totally different context and have nothing to do with a former existence of the Bodhisattva's wife. Thus these stories represent raw material, which is utilized here in an original manner. 27 Moreover, it is possible to identify the actual constraint that motivates this specific reading of the stories. Mara, the god of lust and passion, is in this work the central antagonist28 of Gautama, and Yasodhara as a woman is logically drawn into this cosmic dialectic, to appear in a far less favorable light than in the corresponding Pali tradition.

Such references to past existences are by no means restricted to Jaina and Buddhist Puranic material. King Suratha worshipped the goddess and succeeded in being reborn as the eighth Manu Savarni;29 and it is that life that motivates the inclusion of the *Devimahatmya* into the *Markandeya Purana*. A more fully developed example can be found in the *sthalapurana* of TiruNakari. Kardama, one of Brahma's sons, was suffering from a curse: he was to be born on earth during the four Ages. He asked Visnu for help, but Visnu replied: "This curse you are suffering is due to your *karma*, and I cannot grant you liberation now in the Krta Age. But in the fourth Age I shall grant you liberation."30 So he was reborn first as a Ksatriya king named Vasu, then as a Vaisya named Vairamegha (who also became a king).31 Finally, in the Kali Age, he was born as a Sudranone other than the Vaisnava saint TiruMankai-Alvar, who is worshipped in a side shrine within the temple of TiruNakari, his home-town.32

This may suffice to illustrate initially how the concepts of "information", "situational control", and "rational constraint" could be applied to a variety of Puranic or quasi-Puranic material.

Let us turn now to a further Jaina example taken from the same *Kahakosu*.33 The intention of the story is clear: it is meant to explain how the worship of Siva's *linga* came about and what the Hindus are up to with this cult. The account is conceived of on a large scale, and we must follow our heroes through various past existences, as a *vidyadhara* couple happily married, as gods in the Saudharma heaven, and finally as Prince Satyaki and Princess Jyestha.



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Two royal children were betrothed to each other, but due to a trick of the girl's younger sister, they never get married and become ascetics instead. One day the nun seeks shelter in a mountain cave during a shower and meets her Prince Satyaki. Their brief union results in the birth of a boy, later to be called Svayambhu and then Rudra, "the vicious one." 34 Informed about his origin by his foster-mother, he becomes an ascetic. One day he sees the eight daughters of a *vidyadhara* king (who had been ousted from his rightful kingship by his own brother) bathing in a mountain pool. Rudra helps their father to reconquer his lost city, Tripura and, as a reward, is given the eight girls in marriage. Alas! His passion is so violent that none of the girls can bear it and they all die. Subsequently, many other girls are given to Rudra in marriage, but each suffers the same fate during her wedding night. In despair the king gives him Uma as wife. She is a widow whom unrestrained physical desires have made a libertine. But the passion of her second husband, Rudra, satisfies her. After this success, Rudra becomes very boisterous and travels the world shouting: "I am the creator and destroyer of the world."35

Then he composes the Saivite scriptures in Bharatavarsa and, promulgating them, acquires many followers. His tyranical nature begins to trouble the *vidyadharas* and they scheme to kill him. Through trickery they find out that only while engaged in making love with Uma is he defenseless. So on one such occasion they succeed in cutting his head off [and presumably that of Uma as well; see below]. But his *vidyas*, who have not been consulted beforehand, create terrible calamities in the whole land. A sage named Nandisena knows the remedy: "Cut off Rudra's *linga* (penis) and place it upon Uma's *yoni* (vagina); then worship the *vidyas* with gifts, to propitiate them. If you do that, the calamities will cease."36 The king follows this advice:

> He called all the people of his realm, and built a high platform of bricks. He cut out Uma's *yoni*, that singular mine of sexual delights, and placed it on the platform. Then with effort he placed in its center Siva's *linga*. He bathed it and anointed it with sandal-paste and perfumed it with masses of fine-smelling substances . . . Then the *vidyas* resumed their attitude of forgiveness, and that was the end of the people's afflictions. From that day has originated the shameless worship of the *linga* by people.37

Our initial reaction might be to characterize this passage as a stark distortion of Hindu Puranic material and a rejection of Hindu reli-





gious practices. But why should we do this? If we did not possess the corresponding Hindu versions, and if we were to look at the passage summarized above without its Jaina ideological frame, we would be in no position to talk of "distortion." It is only because we are already familiar with the Hindu side that we can regard the Jaina version as a transformation.

From this we can derive a rather interesting question: are the Hindu versions of the Puranic material more "objective"? As long as we treat "Hinduism" as one undifferentiated whole, and, moreover, as long as we possess no material with which we can contrast it, this must remain a question without an answer. However, during recent years material has been discovered that can be used for such contrastive comparisons (alongside an increasing realisation that "Puranic Hinduism" ought to be differentiated from other forms of Hinduism). So I shall present a rather random selection of examples by means of which we may be able to grasp further facets of the transforming functions of the Puranic tradition.

Still remaining with the Jainas, let us look at the figure of the first *tirthankara*, Rsabha. In Jinasena's *Adi Purana* this sage has been presented as the originator of many features found in the contemporary world of South India; he appears there as a kind of culture-hero. 38 Soon after Jinasena (who died ca. 845 C.E.), a Hindu Purana, namely, the *Bhagavata Purana*, which was composed in the same South Indian environment, takes up the theme. Here (book 5, chapters 1 to 6) Rsabha is presented on the one hand as a descendant (in the fifth generation) from Manu and, on the other hand, as an incarnation of Visnu himself.39 This example clearly illustrates an aspect of the transformatory function of the Puranic tradition.

The same *Bhagavata Purana* offers us further illustrations of this process. There is another South Indian tradition that has been preserved independently from this text, namely, the Tamil poetry of the Alvars. I have shown in detail elsewhere40 that in many instances this Purana actually translates or paraphrases stanzas of that poetic corpus. Here I shall briefly single out two features where the transformation undergone in the text is perhaps particularly striking. There is, first of all, the figure of the deity who is the object of *bhakti*. With the Alvars, it is perhaps best to name this deity Mayon, "he of black complexion." This is a composite figure (in terms of the Sanskrit traditions), in so far as Mayon combines aspects of Krsna and of Visnu. The *Bhagavata* accepts this situation to some extent; thus its metaphysical position could well be described as a form of Krsnaite Advaita. On the other hand, the basic literary model for the Purana is the *Visnu Purana*. Here we find Krsna





treated unequivocally as the avatar of Visnu (a precise formula that is absent in the Alvars). Given that Srivaisnavism follows the *Visnu Purana* in its conception of Krsna, we need not be surprised to find that the *Bhagavata Purana*, and even the Alvars, were increasingly read in this sense. The *Bhagavata*'s recourse to the classical *Visnu Purana* thus initiated a process of major theological transformation.

A second point concerns the specific type of *bhakti* cultivated by the Alvars. This form of devotion, which I have styled *virahabhakti*, implied (in my reading of the poetry) some form of differentiation and autonomy of the full person

experiencing it. 41 The *Bhagavata Purana*, which must be given credit for taking over this type of devotion and making it available to the rest of India, imposed on it a metaphysical framework that sees even in the most ardent separation of the *gopis* ultimately no more than Krsna's own play, "as a boy plays with his own mirror image."42 Moreover, the *bhakti* of the Alvars oriented itself very centrally according to poetic symbols (thereby keeping it within a specific, live cultural context); in the *Bhagavata* it is totally mythologized, above all through the mythological symbol of the *gopis*. However, this transformation of poetic into mythological symbols is a process noticeable already in the later Alvars themselves.43

From Krsna we may turn to the goddess. Here we find ample material to illustrate another form of transformation imposed on independent religious material through the Puranic process. Thus the *Devibhagavata Purana*, by an extraordinary *tour de force*, reinterprets material within the Puranic tradition itself. Relatively few new stories are told about the goddess; instead the Purana tries to demonstrate how in the well-known events of Puranic mythology (which deals almost exclusively with the male *deva*s) the working of Devi (as egoism, delusion, craving, and so on) is hidden. Then in book 9 (which has a very close parallel in the *Brahmavaivarta Purana*) the transformatory process is also applied to a large number of other *devi*s, at least some of whom, we may assume, figured in the actual religious life of the time as independent, autonomous objects of worship.

The *Devibhagavata* is by no means unique with its reinterpretation of traditional Puranic material from the point of view of an autonomous Devi religion. Thus, for example, the *Brhaddharma Purana* also offers us illustrations of this:

When Ravana was creating havoc from his island of Lanka, Brahma approached Visnu for help, suggesting that he be born as King Dasaratha's son. Then the two of them went to Parvati, who





emitted from her body a goddess who had eighteen arms and was surrounded by eight further *devis*. The two gods worshipped her and confessed that they had a problem: Ravana was her devout *bhakta* (devotee), and thus they would not be able to kill him. The Devi devised a scheme by which she would be able to withdraw herself from Lanka and thereby enable Visnu (as Rama) to kill the demon. The birth of Visnu and the other gods on earth took place, and for a time the story follows traditional lines. Then Brahma arrived on earth and discovered a young girl asleep on a leaf of a *bilva* tree. He sang a hymn in her praise: "You are the Sakti in Ravana and Raghava, and you are the pure power in Rudra, Indra, the other gods, and in me, too." 44 But since he had awakened her "at the wrong time for the sake of Ravana's death and for favoring Rama," he made another vow: "We shall worship you on the new-moon day in conjunction with the lunar mansion *ardra*, until you have killed Ravana. Then we shall dismiss you."45 The goddess agreed to this and told them what she would be doing during the next fifteen days, while at the same time specifying what people should doevery yearduring those same fifteen days. Rama then performed her autumnal *puja*, which ended with him killing Ravana on the last day.46

The passage clearly wants to do more than just extoll the greatness and autonomy of the goddess: it wants to provide significance for an annual event, *Durga-puja*, by means of the past events it talks about. The situational constraint on the narrative, which means the motive for the transformation of traditional material, is quite apparent here.

There are other aspects to this process of Puranic transformation. For the Jaina side we have already seen the example of a blatant distortion: the worship of the *linga* was explained in a definitely inimical, ideologically biased manner. Can we now find similar examples in the Hindu Puranas that document a loss of essence, of integrity, through such a transformation? If so, this would yield insights into the ideological function of the Puranic tradition. I shall suggest two cases here, where the availability of parallel but independent material allows us to highlight a particular aspect of that ideological bias.

For the first example we can remain in northeast India, where we find the cult of the *devi* Manasa. There are basically three independent traditions that provide us with information about her: some late, northeastern Puranas (the *Brahmavaivarta Purana* and the *Devibhagavata Purana)*; folktales narrated during the *Manasavrata*; and a literate tradition of *Manasa-mangals*. The simplest





case is that of the *vrata*-story. 47 Here the existence of the goddess Manasa is taken for granted, as is that of her eight sons; but there is no reference to a father or a husband, two characters who are pivotal in the literary tradition of the *Manasa-mangals*. A large number of works in Bengali, Assamese, and Bihari, covering a period of at least three or four hundred

years, have been produced on the basis of some kind of common core (which need not have been a written text and which is not available to us). Smith has compared a number of such *mangals*48 and produced a kind of synopsis of the common, but individually developed, themes. Three such areas are worth mentioning.

The first theme, which is extremely fluid and variously developed, is that of creation. Smith comments: "Some of the Manasa poets, as well as many dealing with Candi and Siva, regularly refer to their works as *Puranas* and, well aware of the Sanskrit parallels, made conscious efforts to pattern their work upon them. As a description of creation was one of the traditional components of a Sanskrit *Purana*, an attempt was made to imitate them in this."49

Not much more common ground is found in the treatment of Manasa's father, the second theme. Siva's seed is frequently made responsible for her birth, but there are other suggestions, too, in some authors. We may presume that this dependance of Manasa on Siva is secondary, given the autonomous existence she displays in the *vrata*-story, and given that she is able to kill Siva and bring him back to life at will! Smith comments: "By being assigned the role of Siva's daughter Manasa was given a direct familial link with the central figure in the popular Bengali divine hierarchy. Siva's enormous popularity, his status as both a textual deity and a powerful local agricultural god, made such a connection not only desirable, but inevitable."50

The third, and perhaps the most interesting, fluid area is that of Manasa's marriage. There are at least three totally different versions of this, but in any case the marriage does not work out. Her ex-husband plays no role in the main body of the *mangal* literature.51

What these three fluid complexes have illustrated is the fact that here the extant *mangal* literature approximates the Puranic tradition (using many Puranic figures and motifs in the process)halfway between an autonomous Manasa figure and what we actually find in the Puranas. Here we are told that the sage Kasyapa created her out of his mind (thus her name, "Manasa") to protect the world from serpents. By performing *tapas* towards Siva and then worshipping Krsna, she managed to acquire supernatural faculties. Married to the irascible sage Jaratkaru, her function was restricted





to giving birth to a son, Astika. Her husband abandoned her. 52 Nothing is left here of Manasa's role and dignity as it is found in the popular, vernacular religious traditions associated with her. Male gods and sages have taken over, producing or abandoning her at will: she has become a mere woman. .. In this context we can return to Smith's remarks: "The compilers of the Puranas must have been aware of the Bengali myth but chose to ignore it. Their accounts are almost totally purged of folk elements and are of little help for our understanding of the popular goddess and her cult. One of their greatest values is what they can tell us about the way in which the compilers transformed their materials when they incorporated them into the Puranas."53

For our second example we have to go to Maharashtra where we find the goddess Yellamma. Again our sources are threefold: poems in rural Marathi dialect, *sthalapuranas* from her two major temples, Mahur and Saundatti, andthrough the identification of Yellamma with Renukathe Puranas. Here again we can distinguish three different attitudes (or historical stages?) towards the status of the Devi. Some of the popular Marathi poems suggest a totally autonomous goddess-figure: unmarried, childless, in full control over gods and demons. Even here she is indiscriminately called Yellamma or Renuka. Like the Goddess of the *Devimahatmya*, she makes her appearances in the world of man, to be challenged by the established authorities (even if this is merely a gardener or a British colonial officer) and to be given blatantly impossible tasks to fulfil. Naturally these stories end with Yellamma winning, taking her revenge on the opponents, and rewarding the faithful with her blessings. Sanskrit phrases which characterize Yellamma as "primordial power," "veil of delusion," and so on, are interspersed into the narrative poetry. Such language offers further pointers towards her perception as autonomous deity.54

We find other poems in which Yellamma has a son, called variously Parsu, Parsaram, Parsuram. It is this son who creates trouble for her and challenges her authority. One of the problems is that the son is "fatherless" (a swearword implying illegitimate birth). This is how she explains it in one poem: "When Siva's daughters had gone to play, I gave my blessings to those six girls. For that I received you from them, without a husband, when I asked them for a child. Thus I have no husband, and you no father."55

Finally, there are poems56 that treat the subject very much along the lines of the Puranas. Renuka was married to the irascible sage Jamadagni, who imposed an impossible task on her. Since she failed in it, the sage ordered Parasurama to cut off her headwhich

he did. (In an altogether different popular Marathi tradition it is the male god Kal-Bhairav who manages to subdue her when she has treated all other male gods in the most humiliating manner. 57) Here we have reached a situation identical to the Puranas' depiction of Renuka: a powerless female, married to a cruel and irascible sage, famous merely for her son Parasurama.

The sthalapurana material introduces further interesting variations. In one poem on Saundatti,58 after Renuka has killed the local demon, she asks her son for water: "'I am feeling so thirsty, my son! Before anything else, refresh me with water.' Parsaram shot an arrow and brought the Ganges up from the Patala (underworld). 'Drink this water, mother!'"

The *sthalapurana* of Mahur59 begins with the conventional account of Renuka's marriage to Jamadagni, the birth of their son Parasurama, and the theft of the Wishing-cow. However, now a new story line begins. The sage is killed by the king, and Renuka is mortally wounded. After killing the Ksatriyas, Parasurama places a yoke on his shoulder, with the corpse of his father in one of the containers hanging from it and his mother in the other one. He wanders through the country until he comes to the hermitage of Dattatreya. There he cremates his father, and his mother commits suttee. Later she rises from the ground there; this is the origin of the temple of Mahur.

This whole process of transformation, controlled by the need to provide specific information, has revealed itself as possessing two dynamic directions. We may choose as our starting point classical standards, which means assuming that there are objective, fixed archetypes (like "the" story about Rama). The various examples discussed so far would then suggest that the Puranic process constantly transforms these by localizing them. Whatever significance is asked for and perceived to exist in the classical models is applied to specific, local situations. The clearest example we have encountered so far is that of the *Durga-puja* prevalent in northeast India. On the other hand, we may choose as our starting point the most restricted, localized milieu available. Now we find that the Puranic process is busy transforming this by providing much wider confines and by creating far larger contexts. This may be described as "integration," but could also be called "distortion," depending on what ideological yardstick one uses. It is a most versatile process, which may be illustrated somewhat further by focusing directly on the aspect of regionalization.

The visitor to a South Indian Vaisnava temple is confronted with a stone sculpture (usually a figure in one of four standard





poses: standing, seated, reclining, or walking) and a specific name given to the figure portrayed (say Padmanabhan or Manavalan). To the superficial observer (and that includes the more popular books on India) this would signify no more than: a temple in which Visnu, or one of his avatars like the Man-lion (Nrsimha), is worshipped. But such a view does not do justice to the actual complexities of the perception of the Srivaisnavas themselves. To them there is something unique here, already indicated by the name given to the deity. This uniqueness derives from a specific past event that took place in that particular spot. The conventional way of the *sthalapuranas* is to say that some sage who encountered Visnu when the latter was busy executing a particular task asked him to abide permanently in that place. The stone image is no less than an externalized presence of Visnu in that particular locality, deriving from a particular event in the past. Similarly, the specific name of the *arca* in a given temple may at first glance be obvious, for example, when we find a lord of thieves (*coranatha*) or a milk thief (*ksiracora*). *O* yes, we may say, that will be Krsna in his aspect of butter thief, and we might leave it at that. But consulting the *sthalapurana*, to our surprise we find that the name is derived from a totally different event, specific to that locality. It may be that Visnu assisted a local band of pious brigands, turning "robber" himself (as in Srivaikuntam); 60 or it may be that Krsna "stole" from the milk used in his daily *puja* so that the sage could taste it (as in Remuna, Orissa).61 Manavala inside the famous temple of Srirangam is not Vasudeva reclining on the serpent in the milk-ocean, as the iconographic type of the *murti* might suggest. He is in fact the eternalised Rama resting on his march towards Lanka and looking with longing towards the island where his Sita is held captive.

This contrast between the classical or pan-Indian and the localized, incidentally, corresponds to an area of misunderstanding between the classical Indianist or philologist and the anthropologista disagreement that prevails even today.62

Having encountered minute local universes of meaning (an individual temple connected with unique events), we must turn round and follow another trend, namely, that into wider realms. In the Tontai region of Tamil Nadu we find a large number of Nrsimha shrines, which continue as far north as Ahobilam in Andhra. In a sense they are all discrete universes; yet when

we read the *sthalapurana* of (Vaisnava) Kancipuram,63 things are envisaged differently.

Once upon a time Nrsimha and the demon Hiranyakasipu were fighting with each other. While the demon produced replicas of





himself from each drop of his blood, Nrsimha did the same from the hairs of his mane. Thus a large area became filled with battling replicas of the main antagonists. The gods exclaimed, when witnessing this, " . . . *aho balam* [what strength!]" Finally Nrsimha put the demon on his lap, tore up his body and killed him by drinking all his blood. This event has been eternalized in Ahobilam, where nine Nrsimha shrines are scattered over the mountain.

Now, the demon had eight ministers, who fled towards the *Satyavrata-ksetra* (Kancipuram). Nrsimha raced after them; during his pursuit he had to rest for one second (*ghatika*),and that produced the temple in Colacinkapuram or Ghatikacala (ca. 100 km northwest of Madras). Meanwhile the demon ministers had hidden in a cave, but the Man-lion's roar made them flee deep into the Patala underworld. Nrsimha decided to abide in the cave permanently, to prevent them from coming out again. (This is the shrine inside the Varadarajapperumal temple complex in Kancipuram.) Now Brahma arrived to perform a sacrifice in order to have a direct vision of Visnu, but other demons tried to destroy his sacrifice. Nrsimha in the cave took on a second live form and chased them away towards the west, settling there to keep them away from the sacrifice. (This is the Kamasika shrine, still in Kancipuram.)

What we find here is an area stretching almost 250 km from north to south, which is provided here with a coherent explanation of the presence of twelve Nrsimha shrines in it. What is particularly interesting is the conceptual mechanism by means of which this is carried out. While one would be inclined to describe the classical avatars of Visnu theologically as manifestations of the eternal in space and time, here we would have to add that moments of this temporal manifestation are, in turn, eternalized in space and matter (the *arca* in the temple). Behind this standsin non-Puranic discoursethe Srivaisnava theology of Visnu's desire to be available to as many people as possible, in the here and now of the concrete world.

This supralocal integration that I have described for Nrsimha may transform classical mythology about the Man-Lion but could not be regarded as a distortion of the significance of each of the temples involved. Let me briefly turn to another, well-known example where this is not the case. It seems legitimate to assume that many Devi temples constitute their own independent and autonomous universes of meaning. The famous story of the dismemberment of Sati serves as a supraregional construct, to integrate such local centers of Devi worship. Using this schema, for example, Maharashtra presents itself as possessing "three and a half" such





*pithas*. But obviously this type of interpretation is highly ideological: eternalized remnants of Sati's body are the center of worship of a married woman totally subservient to the grand male god Siva. Thus it is not surprising to find that in the *sthalapuranas* 64 of such *pithas* other past events are referred to that are less distorting to the local religious cosmos. For example, three different stories are connected with Kolhapur. The first is the well-known myth about Devi killing Mahisa, an event localized directly in this place. The second talks about the demon Kolhasur, who worshipped Mahalaksmi (the name of the Devi in this temple) so that she would leave him alone for a hundred years. After this period, during which he committed endless crimes, the goddess returned and killed him. Finally we hear that Laksmi (Visnu's wife in heaven) was cursed to turn into an elephant cow (in revenge for her jealous curse of a young girl). She descended to earth, performed penance at the *Garudesvara-tirtha* (part of the Kolhapur temple complex), and was released from the curse. While we find here other features that distort the role of Mahalaksmi in the Kolhapur universe of meaning,65 they are less obtrusive than the Sati myth.

I hope that by now enough material has been collected to attempt a more systematic assessment. The situational constraint has presented itself increasingly as the asking for and obtaining of information (the religious significance) with reference to very specific, local or regional, socially well defined contexts (the universes of meaning). Whatever may have been felt about the usefulness of our initial concepts of information and transformation, this further narrowing down may well appear very questionable. It might thus be objected that most of the material adduced so far is of a rather ephemeral, tangential nature when looked at in the context of Purana studies. A more brutal objection might point out that by using primarily *sthalapurana* material we can hardly be surprised when we end up again with locally oriented Puranic processes. I would

like to make three observations here, in answer to such objections.

First, it appears possible to trace sthalapurana feature also in the better-known Upa- and even Mahapuranas. The *Kalika Purana* is certainly very much concerned with the worship of the Goddess in Kamakhya.66 The *Brahmanda Purana* incorporates a very lengthy *Lalita-mahatmya*, which concerns Kamaksi in Kancipuram. The *Devibhagavata Purana* is probably a product of Benares and localizes the Goddess in that town.67 Even the famous *Devimahatmya* might have its regional focus.68

Second, I am not sure whether the relative antiquity of some of the *sthalapuranas* is fully realized. There is evidence to suggest that





(in some form, some of the) South Indian Sanskrit sthalapurana are products of a period prior to the thirteenth century (though later than, say, the eighth). 69 But, in a sense, all of this is no more than window dressing, even if we can thereby make inroads into the classical Puranas. So, third, let me explore a more fundamental question.

Does it make any sense at all to ask what the original intention of the Puranic literature could have been? Well, at least a partial answer is suggested by the work of Kirfel. This scholar has suggested that three ancient repertoire pieces of the ancient Puranic bards can be isolated: the *purana-pañcalaksana*, the *bhuvanavinyasa* and the *sraddhakalpa*.70 In the extant Puranas, certainly the first two tend to be found together. Kirfel is by no means suggesting that he has reconstructed anything like an original core of Puranic literature; for the text he prints is differentiated into various recensions. In fact it would be a misunderstanding to read his material backwards, as it were. The whole layout looks forward in terms of textual history, pointing at an ever-increasing complexity of the Puranic literary process. Thus it is not surprising that other scholars have pursued this line of investigation further by tracing the process, for specific themes, in the direction of the present.71

It is perhaps no accident that the work of Kirfel and Hacker has been ignored by precisely the most vociferous advocates of an ahistorical approach to the Puranas. But something else is vital for our purposes. Not only does text-critical scholarship show itself capable of looking forward and describing organic religious processes; this is also the intention behind at least two of the repertoire pieces identified by Kirfel. The accounts of creation and the structure of the universe, of primordial world history and the Manus, lead up to what must have been the present at some time: the kings in the old Aryavarta. The past is generally used to imbue the present with meaning and, besides, to provide very specific information. This is how I would venture to interpret the *laksana* of *vamsa* (lineage). In the course of time those endless lists of kings and so on lost their relevance (since they do not seem to have been updated), and theism appropriated the now obsolete genre.72 Where matters could be subjected to empirical tests, at least sometimes adjustments were made in the course of the transmission historya remarkable testimony to the rationality of the tradition!73

With this insight in mind we can now go much further. Thus it seems possible to interpret even the Buddhist text of the *Mahavastu* as a Purana in the sense stated. Primordial world history and cosmography leads to the Buddhas of the past, turns to the *rajavamsa*





(lineage of kings) and culminates in the life of Sakyamuni, the culmination, as it were, of history. As we have seen above, the past is further appropriated, in the form of many *jatakas*, to interpret *this* life and, we can add, to read it in the light of contemporary questions and views.

Similarly with the Jainas. Here the texts present themselves as Puranas: *Adi*, *Uttara*, *Maha-*, *Sri-* and so on. Spread out before us is a history of the world, culminating in the last of the Tirthankaras, the Mahavira. Sequences of rebirths overarch this history (particularly through Marici, a contemporary of Rsabha, who was reborn as Triprstha and then became the Mahavira). That this presentation occurred under specific circumstances has been pointed out above. 74

I hope these considerations are sufficient to make my program less ephemeral than it might have appeared at a first glance. By looking first at concrete material that is close to us and that allows us to gain clearer insights into the Puranic process (catching it, as it were, in the act), it may well be possible to abstract more general principles that can then be applied to the study of the ancient texts.

Now it should be obvious that little more has been achieved so far than to suggest that our program might actually prove useful. Many tasks have to be left undone here that would be essential for a more substantial treatment of the subject. I shall simply list some of these.

1. To talk about a Puranic mode of providing meaning implies that there are other such modes. In the case of South Indian Srivaisnava literature, it appears that the *sthalapuranas* do indeed represent a tradition that differs from other types of discourse.75 The theologian would justify the usage of Tamil by the Alvars by saying that Visnu wants to make himself available to as many people as possible. The Puranic justification involves a story about Agastya.76 Or a pun might explain a particular iconographic peculiarity. Why is the *cakra* in the "wrong" (viz., right, instead of left) hand of the Visnu of TirukKovalur? To demonstrate his *daksina* (right, benevolent) attitude.77 Or, in a modern setting, "Why does Krsna have a blue complexion?" a lady at a conference asked an Indian *svami*. "To symbolize the infinity of the blue sky," was his prompt reply.

2. At least for South Indian *sthalapuranas*, a differentiation in terms of symbolism and intention for the Vaisnava and the Saiva material seems likely.78 This would probably have far wider ramifications, in the light of which a generic concept like 'Puranic process' might well reveal itself to be very naive.





3. The Puranic ideology has been treated here mainly with reference to the erosion of autonomous religions of the goddess. Surely there will be many further such ideological aspects.

4. Far more information ought to be gathered about the actual mechanics of transmitting the Puranic tradition. I am thinking here not just about the history of individual texts but also about the Pauranikas as a professional group in which learning is passed on to the next generation.

5. Practically no attention has been paid to the innumerable vernacular translations of the main Puranas. It would be interesting to explore similar situational constraints on the rewritten versions.

6. Finally, the history of the process itself ought to be investigated further. Are we dealing with major, recognizable periods and fashions? How long can we assume the process to have remained alive? On the latter question it seems possible to give a simple answer: the process is still continuing. In 1985 the Swaminarayan Hindu Mission celebrated a "Cultural Festival of India" on a grand scale in London. One of the highlights of the festival was an exhibition called "Cradle of Civilisation," which "portray[ed] the evolution of Indian culture, commencing with the Vedic era and concluding with the modern era, in 63 breathtaking tableaux." 79 The first scene showed the syllable *om*, symbolizing the creation of the world. Then we moved through the ages of the Vedic sages, the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, and the *Bhagavata Purana* to arrive at scenes with famous medieval theologians and poets. At "No. 39," questions about the "meaning of life" were asked, and the remaining scenes provided the answer in the form of an account of the life of Swaminarayana (1781-1840) and his spiritual lineage. Scenes 41 and 42 were particularly interesting from the point of view of the Puranic process: as a child, the saint displayed superhuman powers by reviving a fisherman's catch of fish and throwing it back into the water; some time later, the boy was attacked by a demon named Kalidutta in the dark forests, but a mere flicker of his glance defeated the demon.

Let me sum up in a few words the suggestions that have been made here. A program for exploring the Puranas has been put forward that envisages a historical process of transmitting and imposing meaning, from the past into the present, through a particular mode of discourse (the Puranic) and operating within rational constraints. This process is indirectly documented in a series of texts (themselves of different degrees of solidification and fixation) and, more directly, in the very continuity of the process of producing such works. Behind this dynamic activity lies the acknowledgment of a





need simultaneously to make localized concrete environments meaningful and to expand these limited horizons (integration, pan-Indianization). The meaning as derived from the past and presented through stories has ideological functions that may erode the autonomous situations upon which the stories comment. But this erosion is counterbalanced by the readiness of the Puranic tradition to transform its own premises constantly and not to insist on some absolute, objective account of the past.

III.
FROM HINDU TO JAINA AND BACK AGAIN





# 8
# An Overview of the Jaina Puranas

*John E. Cort*

The Jainas have been prolific composers of Puranas, primarily in Maharastri Prakrit, Apabhramsa, Sanskrit, and Kannada. A list of all the known Jaina Puranas would total about several hundred. Within such a vast body of literature, there is of course a great range in quality and popularity, and over the centuries only a few of these Puranas have remained important for the Jaina tradition. Unlike the Brahminic Sanskrit Puranas, which are anonymous texts composed by many hands and mouths over many centuries, and for which sometimes there seem to be almost as many recensions as manuscripts, for the Jaina Puranas we can assign specific authors and dates of composition. This paper is intended to serve as an introduction into this vast literary corpus for those unfamiliar with Jaina literature, and to suggest some areas for fruitful future research. After first outlining the different subgenres within the body of Jaina Puranas, I will look at the distinctive features of the Jaina Puranas in order to present an internal definition of a Jaina Purana. While this paper does not attempt an explicit overall comparison with the Hindu Puranas, a close look at the nature of the Jaina Puranas can shed light on much of what is distinctive about the Hindu Puranic tradition.





## The Jaina Puranas in Jaina Literature

The oldest stratum of the Jaina Agama (their canon) consists of the eleven Angas. 1 The Digambara Jainas claim that all of the canon was lost except for a small section of the *Drstivada*, the twelfth Anga, dealing with the doctrine of *karma*,2 and so deny that the texts preserved by the Svetambaras are the original texts with those names. The Svetambara Murtipujaka Jainas say that all of the *Drstivada* was lost but claim that their versions of the Angas are the original versions.

The postcanonical texts of both the Svetambara and Digambara traditions are called *anuyogas* (expositions), although this term is used primarily by the Digambaras. The *anuyogas* are divided into four categories. According to the Digambaras, these four are: *prathamanuyoga*, the exposition of the lives of famous and exemplary Jainas, intended for the laity; *karananuyoga*, the exposition of technical matters such as metaphysics and cosmology; *carananuyoga*, the exposition of mendicant discipline; and *dravyanuyoga*, the exposition on philosophical matters such as ontology, epistemology, and psychology. The Svetambara terms for the same four categories are *dharmakatha, ganita, caranakarana*, and *dravya*.

Both Padmanabh Jaini (1979:78) and H. R. Kapadia (1941:57) assign the Jaina Puranas to the *prathamanuyoga* (Svetambara *dharmakatha)*. Hiralal Jain (1962:127) adds that the *prathamanuyoga* was one of the five sections of the lost *Drstivada*, and so implies a quasi-canonical status for the Puranas. This tactic of claiming authoritative status for a text or class of texts by asserting that the text is the direct descendant of a lost canonical text is a common one in Indian religious traditions. Kapadia observes that while *anuyoga* was one of the five sections of the *Drstivada*3 and the content of this *anuyoga* consisted of biographies, there is also the notion of the four *anuyogas* "permeating the entire sphere of the Jaina scriptures" (Kapadia 1941:12). The Jaina Puranas thus can best be characterized as a post-Agamic literary corpus based upon themes found in the Agama.

An external categorization of the Jaina Puranas, in terms of their literary style, is provided by A. K. Warder (1972-83; 1975) and G. C. Caudhari (1973). Viewing the Jaina Puranas from the general perspective of Indian literature, they both describe the Puranas as *kavya*, or epics in poetic style.

In terms of their contents, the Jaina Puranas can be described as biographies.4 Whereas the Hindu Puranas are extensively preoc-





cupied with the activities of the gods and goddesses on an often transcendent level, the Jaina Puranas are concerned with the lives of specific human beings who lived at specific times in Jaina history. Thus, many of the Jaina Puranas are called *caritras* (literally, "deeds" or "acts"), the Indian literary genre that most closely resembles the Western genre of biography. In general, the Digambaras called their works "Puranas" and the Svetambaras called their works "Caritras," although in some cases both terms are applied to the same work; there is no difference in genre implied by the use of the different terms.

Unlike the Brahminic Sanskrit tradition, the Jaina tradition did not develop a distinction between the genres of Purana and *itihasa* (epic). In this respect the Jaina tradition is similar to many of the vernacular literary traditions, such as Oriya, wherein both the Oriya *Mahabharata* and the Oriya *Bhagavata Purana* are sectarian tellings of the regional cult of Jagannatha. At the same time, the Jaina Puranas are less inclusive than the Hindu Puranas. The Jaina Puranas did not have the same all-absorbent capacity as their Hindu namesakes. We do not find the proliferation of *mahatmyas* of specific *tirthas* that mark many Hindu Puranas (although pilgrimage has been as important a religious act in the Jaina tradition as in the Hindu), and so an important text such as Dhanesvarasuri's *Satruñjaya Mahatmya* (7th-8th c.) 5 was not incorporated into any Purana, but remained an independent text. Nor did the Jaina Puranas absorb ritual, cultic, and sectarian texts as did the Hindu Puranas.

Jaina literature has been the major repository for the *katha* (story) literature, the third major narrative tradition in India besides the Brahminic Puranas and Epics. This tradition of story literature is represented in the literatures of the Hindus, Buddhists, and Jainas, but most of what we possess today has been preserved by the Jainas. It not only permeates the Jaina Puranas but is also extensively represented in Jaina commentarial and homilitic literature.6 The statement of Johannes Hertel (1922:11) that "during the middle ages down to our days the Jains . . . were the principle story tellers of India" is not as hyperbolic as it might at first seem, and the Jaina Puranas should be of central interest to scholars looking at story and oral traditions in India.

A general morphological definition of a Jaina Purana is, therefore, that it is a postcanonical biographical *kavya* that has much overlap with the genre of story. The Jaina Puranas can be divided into three major types in terms of content. These are: (1) the life of one of the twenty-four Tirthankaras or Jinas of the present age





(Jinacaritra); (2) the Jaina version of the story of Rama (*Ramayana* or *Padmacaritra*); and (3) the Jaina version of the story of Krsna and the Bharata war (*Harivamsa*). Covering all these topics are the Jaina Mahapuranas, which give the biographies of all of the sixty-three heroes of the present age. These sixty-three heroes, known as *salaka purusas* or Eminent People (see below), are the twenty-four Tirthankaras or Jinas, twelve Cakravartins, and nine linked trios of heroes, the nine each Vasudevas, Baladevas, and Prati-vasudevas. They are not so much unique characters as they are archetypical characters who repeatedly act correctly and incorrectly according to the guiding principle of *karma* in the moral universe of the Jainas.

## The Jina Caritra

The primary meaning of *caritra* (Prakrit *carita, cariya*) is "conduct, acts, deeds," and hence a secondary meaning of *caritra* is the literary genre equivalent to biography in English. The related *caritra* is also a technical term in Jainism for religious conduct, and *samyakcaritra* (correct conduct) is one of the *ratnatraya*, the three gems, 7 which are the three foundations and prerequisites of *moksa* (liberation). Thus a Jinacaritra, a life story of a Tirthankara, is not just a biography but also a telling of the proper conduct on the *moksamarga*, the path to *moksa. A caritra* is not a biography in the modern sense of an investigation into what made a particular person either unique or representative of his or her time but rather a telling of how one soul (*atman*) travelled along the predetermined correct path to *moksa*.

Relating the lives of the twenty-four Jinas of the present cycle of time has always been a popular topic for Jaina authors. One of the earliest extant Jaina texts, the *Kappa Sutta* (Sanskrit *Kalpa Sutra*) attributed to Bhadrabahu Svami (third century B.C.E.),8 contains a lengthy biography of Vardhamana Mahavira (the twenty-fourth Jina) and shorter biographies of

Parsvanatha (twenty-third), Neminatha/Aristanemi (twenty-second), and Rsabhanatha/ Adinatha (first).9 These early biographies covered only the human lives of the Tirthankaras, especially the five beneficial events (*kalyanakas*) of conception (*cyavana*),birth (*janma*), renunciation (*diksa*), enlightenment (*kaivalya*), and liberation (*moksa, nirvana*).10 With the passage of time authors of subsequent texts came to embellish the stories by describing many of the previous births of the Tirthankaras, as well as adding many incidents to the final incarna-





Table 8.1 Biographies of Tirthankaras

| NAME OF TIRTHANKARA | ORDER OF TIRTHANKARA | NUMBER OF BIOGRAPHIES |
|---|---|---|
| Neminatha | 22 | 34 |
| Santinatha | 16 | 29 |
| Rsabhanatha | 1 | 24 |
| Parsvanatha | 23 | 24 |
| Mahavira | 24 | 19 |
| Candraprabha | 17 | 17 |
| Mallinatha | 19 | 14 |
| Munisuvrata | 20 | 12 |

*Source*: H. D. Velankar, *Jinaratnakosa* (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1944).

tions of the Tirthankaras. In this way the authors explained the effects of *karma* graphically and exhaustively, for the *karma* acquired in one action in one life might not ripen and fall away until many lives (and pages) later. The stories of opponents of the Tirthankaras, also described through many lives, were added to some of these stories. The authors could thereby trace the effects of bad as well as good actions; while the hero alternated a life as a human or an animal with a life in some heaven, the opponent alternated between earth and some hell. The mendicant authors were able to gratify an urge common to many moralistic authors and describe the torments of the residents of hell in great detail. While the individual authors may well have invented some of the stories to display their own creative imagination, presumably most of the stories were taken from the oral traditions of the time and were well known to the audience listening to the recitation. By applying Jaina theories of *karma* to the tales, the authors could both reinforce the understanding of the Jaina listeners and try to convince non-Jainas of the correctness of the Jaina teachings.

These biographies became very popular subjects for medieval Puranic authors, and eventually individual *caritras* were written for each of the twenty-four Tirthankaras. 11 H. D. Velankar, in his catalogue of Jaina texts, listed more than two hundred Caritras and Puranas. The most popular Tirthankaras in terms of numbers of separate biographies are given in Table 8.1.





The Jaina Ramayana

The Jaina versions of the story of Rama (or Padma, as he is also known in the Jaina tradition) constitute what is probably the most-studied area of Jaina literature aside from the Agamas. 12 The story of Rama is an old one within the Jaina tradition; the earliest extant Jaina telling of the story is Vimalasuri's *Paümacariya*. Dated variously between 2 C.E. and 474 C.E., this is the earliest surviving Jaina Purana.13 It is primarily written in Maharastri, with a few sections in Sauraseni. There is wide disagreement among scholars as to the date of the *Paümacariya*. The earliness of the text can be seen in its occasional use of Sauraseni and in the lack of any clear sectarian preference on the part of Vimalasuri in his telling of the story.14 Thus it was probably written before the Svetambara-Digambara split was finalized and sectarian differences hardened, and certainly before the final redaction of the Svetambara canon at the councils of Valabhi and Mathura in the fifth century C.E. Until there is a careful linguistic study of the text, the safest statement concerning the date of composition of the *Paümacariya* is that it was composed sometime in the first five centuries of the common era.15

Some scholars have viewed the differences in the Jaina versions of the Rama story as attempts by Jaina authors to change the Valmiki Rama story into a Jaina moralizing tract.16 While Vimalasuri pointedly disagrees with Valmiki's rendering of

many episodes, the antiquity of Vimalasuri's version may well mean that he had access to episodes and accounts still prevalent in the oral tradition of that time, which had either been left out or changed in the Valmiki version and have since disappeared from the Hindu tradition due to the primacy of Valmiki's version within Indian culture. It is just as likely that Valmiki greatly changed the earlier oral heroic epic to make it into a Brahminic Hindu tract and that parts of Vimalasuri's version represent an older, pre-Hindu, non-Brahminic tradition. That Rama and Ravana are characterized in the Jaina Rama story as humans, whereas Valmiki portrays them as a god and a demon, offers a case in point.17 Neither version has clear and logical priority over the other. The way in which the contents of the Jaina Ramayanas and Mahabharatas were thoroughly Jainized by Jaina authors suggests the extent to which the Hindu Ramayanas and Mahabharatas were Hinduized and Brahminized by their Hindu Brahmin authors and redactors.18



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The Jaina Harivamsa

In contrast to the Jaina versions of the Rama story, the Jaina versions of the story of Krsna have been little studied. But this story is just as important as the Rama story within the Jaina tradition; perhaps it is even more so, given the long-standing interaction between Jainas and the Vaisnava Krsna cult in Mathura and western India.

The Jaina versions of the Krsna story are known as Harivamsa Puranas, in line with the oldest Hindu version of the Krsna story. 19 Vimalasuri is said to be the author of the earliest Jaina version of the Krsna story in his *Harivamsa Purana*. But no manuscripts of this text have been found, and it is likely that authors of later Jaina Harivamsas wanted an antiquity and pedigree for their story as great as those of the Jaina Rama story and so attributed a *Harivamsa Purana* to Vimalasuri as the source for their own works. The oldest extant Jaina telling of the story of Krsna is the Sanskrit *Harivamsa Purana* of Jinasena (known as Punnata Jinasena, after his lineage designation, to distinguish him from the later Digambara author of the same name), finished in 783 C.E. in Gujarat.

The Jaina version of the story of Krsna, however, is found at earlier levels of Jaina literature, in the Svetambara Agama. The *Antagada-dasao*, one of the Angas, contains a brief account of the life of Krsna.20 As with the Ramayanas, the Jaina tellings of the story of Krsna are less violent and bloody than the Hindu versions. The Jaina versions also have different genealogies of the characters. The role of Kamsa is de-emphasized and that of Jarasandha emphasized in comparison with the Hindu versions. Early Jaina tellings almost totally ignore the Pandavas, although a later tradition of Pandava Puranas filled out their story.21 The Jaina story of Krsna was a popular one for Digambara authors in Karnataka. Svayambhu told the story in conjunction with that of Neminatha in his Apabhramsa *Ritthanemicariu*. Kannada22 versions of the Krsna story were composed by Gunavarma23 and Pampa24 in the late ninth and early tenth centuries.

Mahapurana

Within the Hindu Puranic tradition, there is an undefined distinction between an Upapurana, or Lesser Purana, and a Mahapurana, or Great Purana. This distinction appears to have been



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based on the breadth and nonsectarian nature of the material covered in a Mahapurana, but the distinction becomes practically unusable upon closer scrutiny of the Puranas themselves. A major problem is the accretive, composite nature of the Hindu Puranas, whereby works of different sectarian traditions could find niches for themselves within the Puranas. But the fact that the Jaina Puranas were written by individual authors and did not absorb other texts over time, meant that within the Jaina Puranic tradition there was a valid, usable distinction between a Purana and a Mahapurana. A Jaina Purana focused on the life story of one Jaina hero (or a cluster of heroes, as in the Ramayanas and Harivamsas), whereas a Jaina Mahapurana gave the life stories of the entire cycle of sixty-three *salaka purusas*, or Jaina heroes (see below).

While the first Jaina Purana, the *Paümacariya* of Vimalasuri, contains the stories of all sixty-three of the Jaina heroes, the first text explicitly to be called a Mahapurana is the Maharastri Prakrit *Caüppannamahapurisacariya* of the Svetambara Acarya Silanka, composed in 868 C.E. 25 The greatest of the Mahapuranas was the Sanskrit *Mahapurana* composed in Karnataka by the Digambaras Jinasena and Gunabhadra slightly later in the same century.

Jinasena (not to be confused with his namesake, the slightly earlier Punnata Jinasena, who lived in Gujarat) is considered to

be the finest of the Jaina Purana authors in terms of literary style. Jinasena was a Brahmin convert to Jainism who, along with his teacher Virasena, is credited with converting Amoghavarsa, the Rastrakuta king, to Jainism (Upadhye 1968:728).26

Perhaps in competition with the Digambara *Mahapurana*, the great Gujarati Svetambara Acarya Hemacandra, between 1160 and 1172 C.E., wrote his *Trisastisalakapurusacaritra*, covering in great detail the lives of all sixty-three heroes. Hemacandra was the preceptor and advisor of Kumarapala, the Jaina Caulukya emperor of Gujarat, and was instrumental both in Kumarapala's accession to the throne, when the previous Saivite emperor Jayasimha Siddharaja died heirless, and in Kumarapala's efforts to transform Gujarat into an ideal Jaina state. Hemacandra is also known for his important contributions to Sanskrit aesthetic theory, Sanskrit and Prakrit grammar and lexicography, and Jaina philosophy and ethics, and for the encyclopedic breadth of his scholarship.27

The *Trisastisalakapurusacaritra* is the only Jaina Purana to have been translated in its entirety into English or any other non-Indian language. This heroic six-volume translation, published in the Gaekwad's Oriental Series between 1931 and 1962, was the lifework of the American Sanskritist Helen M. Johnson. In part because





of this translation, and in part because of the predominance of Svetambara studies among Western scholarship of the Jainas, 28 Hemacandra's work has been the best known and most studied of all the Jaina Puranas. But in terms of social and historical importance and literary style, this is not Hemacandra's most important work, nor is it as important as a normative and influential Jaina text as Jinasena's *Adi Purana*. While Hemacandra's work is rightly praised as a storehouse of information on Jaina practice and belief in medieval Gujarat, one does not hear the same praises for the quality of Hemacandra's writing and poetry that one hears for Jinasena's work.

Another important Mahapurana is the Apabhramsa *Mahapuranu* of Puspadanta. He came from a Brahmin family that had converted to Digambara Jainism. He was patronized by Bharata, an official in the Rastrakuta court, and at Bharata's request composed his *Mahapuranu*. He finished it in 965 C.E., after six years of work. A. K. Warder (1975:191) and Nathuram Premi (1956:225) consider him to have been the finest of the Apabhramsa poets.

Soon after Puspadanta, a Kannada Mahapurana was composed by Camundaraya. He was a general in the waning years of the Ganga dynasty in the late tenth century C.E. who almost single-handedly held the kingdom together. He was also a patron of the poet Ranna and arranged for the carving of the famous colossal fifty-seven-foot standing image of the Jaina hero Gommatesvara/Bahubali at Sravana Belgola. His *Trisastilaksanamahapurana* is the oldest Kannada work in continuous prose. This work became so identified with its author that it is generally known as the *Camundaraya Purana*.29

## Jaina Puranas: An Internal Definition

We have seen above two ways in which the Jaina Puranas can be defined. One is that a Jaina Purana is a post-Agamic biographical *kavya* that tells a *katha*. The second is according to the four subgenres of Jinacaritra, Ramayana, Harivamsa, and Mahapurana. To understand fully the distinctiveness of the Jaina Puranas, however, they need to be placed in the context of the Jaina universal history, which allows for a neat categorization of all the Jaina Puranas.

Within the Hindu Puranic tradition, the fivefold definition of a Purana as given by Amarasimha in his *Amarakosa* was widely accepted as normative. These five attributes of a Purana, the *purana-pañcalaksana*, provided an agreed-upon conceptual framework within which the Hindu Puranas were located.





Shaktidhar Jha (1978:52-53) has attempted to find in Jinasena's *Adi Purana* an exact parallel for the *pañcalaksana* of Amarasimha. Padmanabh S. Jaini, in this volume, has similarly advanced the proposition that Vimalasuri used the *pañcalaksana* as guidelines for the Jaina Puranas, albeit under different names. Their arguments, however, remain unconvincing. Given that both Jaina and Hindu Puranas present their traditions as total worldviews and universal histories, and therefore of necessity discuss similar topics, one is not thereby justified in arguing that the Jainas borrowed the Hindu *pañcalaksana* scheme. The authors of the Jaina Puranas were not shy about explaining where the Brahmin authors were incorrect in other areas; but never do they say they are now presenting the correct understanding of the *pañcalaksanas*, which had been incorrectly stated by the Brahmins.

At the beginning of the *Adi Purana* Jinasena lists seven topics that are covered in the biography: the nature of the world at that time, the rise of the *kuladharas*, the rise of the ruling dynasties, the rule of Rsabha as king, the arhantship of Rsabha, his liberation, and the end of that age. 30 Since Rsabhanatha was the first Tirthankara in the present cycle of time, several elements found in his biography are not in the other Jinacaritras. The *kuladharas* were the "lineage-heads," fourteen in number, who presided over humanity during the long time before Rsabha, a time so pleasant that liberation was impossible. Rsabha was the first king, and from his descendants the other ruling dynasties arose. With the *nirvana* of Rsabha, the third of the six time periods (*yuga*) in the present cycle of time came to an end. Rsabha was also one of the few Tirthankaras actually to rule; while all Tirthankaras came from royal (*ksatriya*) families, most renounced worldly life before sitting on the throne. The other three topics in this biography (the nature of the world, Rsabha's arhantship, and his liberation) are common to all Jinacaritras.

Elsewhere in the *Adi Purana*, Jinasena gives other descriptions of the contents of a Jaina Purana. In chapter 2 he says that a Jaina Purana describes *ksetra, kala, tirtha, satpumsa*, and *vicestita*.31 He then defines these terms.32 *Ksetra* refers to the arrangement of the three realms: the heavens, earth, and the hells. *Kala* refers to the three times: past, present, and future. *Tirtha* are the aids to liberation. *Satpumsa* are the people who work within the *tirthas* for the liberation of others (that is, the Tirthankaras and other Jaina heroes). *Vicestita* is the conduct of these *satpumsas*.33 In the fourth chapter he lists eight topics covered in a Purana: worlds, countries, cities, kingdoms, holy places, gifting, asceticism, and the natural order.34 This is a totally human scheme, a description of the





contents of the human universe rather than an attempt to situate the human universe within a vaster cosmic system. Finally, Jinasena also says simply that a Purana is a history (*itihasa*). 35 None of these various lists, however, adequately defines what is distinctive about a Jaina Purana.36 The contents could be found in a wide variety of Jaina texts, many of which make no claim to be Puranas. For the distinctive feature of a Jaina Purana, what I call the "internal definition" of a Jaina Purana, we must turn to the elaboration of the sixty-three heroes, the *salaka purusas*.

The stories of the sixty-three *salaka purusas*, or Great Men, formed the basis of what German scholars, such as Hermann Jacobi, Helmuth von Glasenapp, Walther Schubring, Ludwig Alsdorf, and Klaus Bruhn, and, following them in English, A. K. Warder have termed the Jaina *Universalgeschichte* (universal history). This universal history provided the contextual framework within which the Jaina Puranic tradition was located. Therefore, we can define a Jaina Purana as a text dealing with the life story of one or more of the sixty-three Jaina heroes, and a Mahapurana as a text dealing with the entire universal history. But before discussing the details of this universal history, it will be useful briefly to trace its beginnings with the Jaina tradition.

The Svetambara Murtipujaka *Kappa Sutta* (Sanskrit *Kalpa Sutra*) gives the biographies of the Jinas of the present time-cycle and when they lived. It does not mention any of the other *salaka purusas* by name, nor does it use the word *salaka purusa* itself, but it does mention the categories of Arhats (Tirthankaras), Cakravartins, Baladevas, and Vasudevas as always being born in royal (*ksatriya*) families, thus foreshadowing fifty-four of the sixty-three *salaka purusas*.37

There are other references to the *salaka purusas* in the Svetambara Agamas, in particular the *Thananga*38 and the *Samavayanga*. The latter text in different places gives descriptions of sixty-three and fifty-four *salaka purusas*.39 An early description of the developing Jaina universal history is found in the Digambara *Satkhandagama*.40

The tradition of there being only fifty-four *salaka purusas* continued until at least the mid-ninth century C.E., when the Svetambara Silanka composed his *Caüppannamahapurisacariya* (The Deeds of the Fifty-four Great Heroes). But with the composition by Jinasena and Gunabhadra of the *Mahapurana*, also known as the *Trisastilaksanamahapurana* (The Great Purana Describing the Sixty-three Heroes), the number of *salaka purusas* became fixed at sixty-three. Velankar (1944) in his *Jinaratnakosa* does not give any





texts after Silanka's in which the title refers to only fifty-four s*alaka purusas*.

Vimalasuri framed his telling of the story of Rama within the context of the sixty-three *salaka purusas*, so the tradition of sixty- three *salaka purusas* is at least as old as the fifth century C.E. Vimalasuri claimed that he was transmitting a tradition

handed down from the time of Mahavira and that the stories of the s*alaka purusas* were to be found in the lost category of ancient texts known as Purvas. A. K. Warder (1972-83:2:227) has stressed the importance of the *Paümacariya* in the development of the Jaina universal history, from the brief outlines given in the earlier Ardha-Magadhi texts to the later massive works in which the history is laid out in full detail:

> Vimala established in literature the entire structure of Jaina universal history . . . it was his genius to create and give life to this grandiose conception out of the abstract sketch offered in the Jaina canon. His work is to be appreciated as a whole . . . Its study is also necessary to understand the many later *kavyas* by Jaina authors which move within its literary universe. Vimala's influence . . . consists in his being followed in detail by so many Jaina writers, though hardly any of them acknowledge their source.

Before discussing the different categories of heroes within the *salaka purusa* scheme, I want to touch briefly upon the significance of the number 63. Many people have noted that the number of Tamil Saivite Nayanar singer-saints also was 63. 41 This number appears to have been artificially imposed upon the tradition, much as we often find lists of 108 objects in India. It appears that the numbering of the Nayanars as 63 was in direct imitation of the earlier Jaina tradition, as the number is not found in the Saiva tradition until centuries after it appears in the Jaina tradition. The Nayanars lived during the period from the seventh to the tenth centuries, by which time the Jaina tradition of the 63 *salaka purusas* was well established. The unanswered (and quite likely unanswerable) question is: Why 63? Also unanswered is whether this was a Jaina internal development or something the Jainas picked up from a South Indian folk tradition that also fed into the Nayanar tradition.

An argument for a possible non-Jaina source for the importance of the number 63 is the arbitrariness of the number within the Jaina tradition. As mentioned above, there was within the Jaina tradition a tension as to whether there were 54 or 63 *salaka pur-*





*usas*. During the eleventh and twelfth centuries C.E., Bhadresvara in his *Kahavali* raised the number to 72 by adding the 9 Naradas to the list (Parekh 1974:152). Jagmanderlal Jaini (1916:5,127-28) gives a list of 106 other important people in the Jaina universal history: the 24 mothers and 24 fathers of the Tirthankaras, 9 Naradas, 11 Rudras, 24 Kamadevas, and 14 Kulakaras. Similar information is found in a late fifth to early seventh century Digambara cosmo-graphical text, the *Tiloya Pannatti* (4.510-1472) of Yativrsabha. This text gives descriptions of other Jaina heroes such as the 11 Rudras, 9 Naradas, and 24 Kamadevas, but specifically says that there are only 63 *salaka purusas*. 42 Yativrsabha explains that the 9 Naradas are anti-Rudras who are fond of war and thus go to hell, while the 24 Kamadevas (of whom Rsabha's son Bahubali was the first) are heroes with especially lovely bodies who attain liberation, and one of whom lives during the time of each Tirthankara.

The use of the term *salaka* in the context of the *salaka purusa* scheme is a somewhat unusual one. Its primary meaning, in Sanskrit as *salaka*, in Pali as *salaka*, and in Prakrit as *salaga* and *salaya*, is "stick." Within a Buddhist context it acquired a specialized meaning as "a ticket consisting of slips of wood used in voting and distributing food" (Rhys Davids and Stede 1975:699). This meaning, however, is not found in the Jaina tradition. Prakrit *salaga/salaya* has three definitions: (1) a stick; (2) a special kind of measurement; and (3), joined with *purisa*, to denote the great heroes (Sheth 1963:881).

S. D. Parekh (1974:152-53) quotes Hemacandra as saying that the sixty-three heroes are *salakas* who have become especially marked among men.43 Parekh goes on to emphasize that it is as though the names of the *salaka purusas* were underlined or especially significant. Parekh also discusses the use *of salakas* as voting tickets among the non-Aryan people of ancient Magadha, such as the Sakyas, Licchavis, and Vaidehas. From this he concludes that a *salaka purusa* is a great person whose greatness has been accepted by the general publicwho has won a popularity contest or general election, as it were.

For the present, Parekh's conclusions will be accepted. It would be useful, however, to know if *salaka* is used in early Jaina writings in contexts other than s*alaka purusa*. The medieval and modern usage of *salaka* in *anjana salaka*, the "eye-opening" rite by which a *sadhu* enlivens a *murti* (image for worship), is a totally separate usage of the word, derived from its primary meaning as a stick. In an interview, one contemporary Svetambara Murtipujaka *acarya* defined *salaka* in *salaka purusa* as meaning *saktisali*, "imbued with

power." While this folk definition is etymologically untenable, it does convey accurately the sense of the Jaina attitude towards the *salaka purusas*. The extent to which *salaka* can also be taken as simply a synonym for great (*maha*) is seen in Silaka's Purana being entitled the *Caritra of the Fifty-four Mahapurusas*.

A list of the names and temporal relationships of the sixty-three *salaka purusas* is appended to this paper. The sixty-three heroes appear during every cycle of time, although the names of the individuals are different in each cycle.

The Tirthankaras or Jinas are the twenty-four teachers or saviors who establish or reestablish the Jaina teachings on earth. *Tirtha* means "ford," and *kara* means "maker," so a Tirthankara (or Tirthakara) is a "maker of a ford," that is, one who helps people across the ocean of worldly sorrows and suffering to liberation. Jainas also define *tirtha* as the *caturvidha sangha*, the four-fold religious congregation of *sadhus*, *sadhvi*s, *sravaka*s, and *sravika*s (male mendicants, female mendicants, laymen, and laywomen), which is established by each Tirthankara (Sheth 1963:437). The twenty-four Tirthankaras of the present time cycle are the central figures in both Jaina universal history and Jaina cult practice.

The relationship between great religious teachers and Cakravartins, world conquerors, was a strong one in the non-Vedic religious traditions. The Buddha would have become a Cakravartin if he had chosen a worldly path. 44 Of the twelve Jaina Cakravartins, three of them (Santinatha, Kunthunatha, and Aranatha) later became Tirthankaras. The closeness between the Tirthankara and the Cakravartin is seen in that the alternative word more commonly used for Tirthankara is Jina, "Victor," here meaning one who is victorious in the spiritual as opposed to political realm. Before the birth of either a Tirthankara or a Cakravartin, his mother sees the same number of auspicious dreams.45

Only three of the twelve Cakravartins (Bharata, Sagara, and Sanatkumara) are found also in the Hindu tradition, and the twelfth Cakravartin, Brahmadatta, is very popular in the Buddhist Jatakas. Although the Jaina Rama/Padma does not become a Cakravartin (or even a king, for that matter), we do find a Padma listed among the Cakravartins, perhaps representing another strand of the Rama story within Jainism. The Cakravartins, in addition to being world conquerors, are also devout patrons and followers of Jainism. At the end of their lives, they renounce their thrones, become *sadhus*, and eventually attain liberation.

The biographies of the remaining twenty-seven *salaka purusas*





are all closely interrelated. The nine Baladevas are righteous Jainas who stick firmly to the central Jaina ethical principle of *ahimsa*, nonviolence. They are represented by Rama in the Rama story and by Balabhadra in the *Harivamsa*. Because of their adherence to *ahimsa*, after renouncing the world at the end of their lives they attain liberation.

The Vasudevas are half-brothers (same father, different mothers) of the Baladevas. They are also half-Cakravartins, with half the status and power of full Cakravartins. They are represented by Laksmana and Krsna in the two main cycles. They engage in war and kill their enemies, the Prati-vasudevas, for which they are reborn in hell. But befitting their status as *salaka purusas*, the Vasudevas will be reborn in the next time cycle as Tirthankaras. The Prati-vasudevas (represented by Ravana and Jarasandha) are Jaina kings who, through the powers of asceticism and devotion to the Jinas, have become powerful wizards. They misuse their powers and ultimately are slain by the Vasudevas and reborn in hell.

Padmanabh Jaini, in his essay in this volume, has hypothesized that the twenty-seven Vasudevas, Baladevas, and Prati-vasudevas are an addition to the earlier list of twenty-four Tirthankaras and twelve Cakravartins and that the later figures were included within the Jaina tradition as a result of its interaction with the popular Bhagavata cult and its two brother-deities, Balarama and Krsna, in the area around Mathura in the Maurya and Sunga periods. However, as mentioned above, the categories of the Vasudevas and the Baladevas are found in the *Kappa Sutta* and quite possibly predate the Jaina-Vaisnava interaction at Mathura.

The Vasudeva represents the ideal Jaina king, who protects the Jaina society but, unlike the Cakravartin, is not so perfect as to be able to attain liberation in this life. The Baladeva, on the other hand, represents the detached layman who does not participate in the violence inherent in the broader society. Perhaps these two represent ideal types for the two elements that made up early and medieval Jaina society, the Ksatriyas and the Vaisyas. While the Ksatriyas sacrificed their own chances of liberation in this lifetime in order to maintain and further Jaina society, the Vaisyas stayed aloof from politics and warfare and sought to further both their own spiritual well-being and that of Jaina society in general through strict adherence to *ahimsa*. While today the Jainas are almost all of merchant castes, it is important to remember that many generals and other royal advisors in Karnataka and Gujarat were Jainas during the time when the Jaina Puranas describing the *salaka pur-*

*usas* were being composed, and many Jaina castes, such as the Osavalas of Gujarat and Rajasthan, that today are of Vaisya status claim that they were originally Ksatriyas.

While the mother of a Tirthankara or Cakravartin sees fourteen or sixteen auspicious dreams 46 when the embryo enters her womb, the mother of a Vasudeva sees seven,47 and the mother of a Baladeva only four.48 The mother of a Prati-vasudeva sees no dreams. The Tirthankaras and Cakravartins, on the one hand, and the Vasudevas and Baladevas, on the other, represent two different planes of activity. The Baladevas, the devout laymen who attain liberation, correspond to the Tirthankaras, the perfect heroes who become world teachers. The Vasudevas, the imperfect half-Cakravartins and half-brothers of the Baladevas, correspond to the Cakravartins, the perfect kings who become world rulers and then attain liberation. The vertical rank between these two planes is represented by the number of dreams seen by the hero's mother. Horizontally, the superiority of the Tirthankaras can be seen in that they are the supreme teachers of the Jaina tradition, whereas the Cakravartins, although they attain liberation, rank only among the Siddhas, the other liberated and perfected souls besides the Tirthankaras. The precedence of the Tirthankaras over the Siddhas can also be seen in the *namaskara mantra* that is chanted daily by all Jainas as a "confession of faith" in which obeisance is expressed first to the Tirthankaras and then to the Siddhas. The horizontal superiority of the Baladevas over the Vasudevas is seen in that they attain liberation, whereas the latter, although they will attain liberation in a future life, must first be reborn in hell. We therefore have a fourfold division of the *salaka purusas*, which can be read both top-to-bottom and left-to-right in terms of superior rank (fig. 8.1). This fourfold division of the *salaka purusas* also corresponds to both the fourfold division of the Jaina congregation into *sadhus, sadhvis, sravakas*, and *sravikas*, and the fourfold division of samsaric existence into gods (*devata*), humans (*manusya*), animals and plants (*tiryanc*), and hell-beings (*naraka*).

In sum, the scheme of the *salaka purusas* represents a conceptual framework within which the Jainas elaborated their own view of history. As such, it can be juxtaposed with the Hindu *pañcalaksana* definition as providing a self-definition of the Jaina Puranas. V. Narayana Rao has argued, in this volume, that the *pañcalaksana* provide the framework within which the Hindu Puranas are located, that is, that the events described in a Hindu Purana fall within a specific *sarga, pratisarga*, and *manvantara*. The *salaka purusa* scheme provides a roughly similar framework, for the events in a Jaina Purana are circumscribed by the *salaka purusas*.





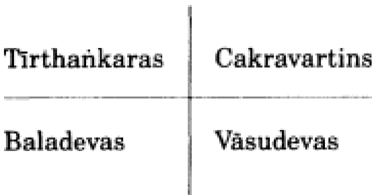



Figure 8.1

A. K. Warder has rightly observed the importance of the framework of the Jaina universal history for a work such as Vimalasuri's *Paümacariya*. What seems irrelevant from a Western perspective concerned with plot is essential from a Jaina perspective in order to establish the larger context within which the story occurs (Warder 1972-83:2:225):

> The setting of universal history is not simply an introduction, certainly not an irrelevant digression from the story; it is an essential part of the narrative because it tells us what the universe is like, as the author understands it, and it is the nature of the universe which explains the life of the hero. The Life of Padma [*Paümacariya*] is an artistic presentation of the Jaina view of the universe, a universe in which everything is alive and in which assault on life is the ultimate evil.

It is important to remember, however, that this is a conceptual framework, operating on the level of educated, literate discourse. It is not a framework that can be applied to actual Jaina cult practice. Except for the Tirthankaras, the *salaka purusas* are not cult figures for the Jainas, and important cult figures such as the *yaksas, yaksis*, goddesses, *viras*, and Bahubali, who are important on the level of ritual action, find no place directly within the *salaka purusa* scheme. In this way

it is similar to some of the Hindu avatars, which also incorporate heroes who are important on a mythic, universal historical, or conceptual level, such as Matsya, Kurma, or Parasurama, but who are not necessarily popular cult figures. This comparison is doubly appropriate, for authors such as Kirfel (1959:40) and Bruhn (1961:8) have argued that the Hindu avatars evolved in part in reaction to the non-Hindu, and especially Jaina, universal histories. In the same way that the Tirthankaras repeatedly revitalize the Jaina teachings, the Vaisnavite avatars repeatedly revive the Hindu *dharma*.

Both the Jainas and Buddhists developed universal histories that differed greatly from that of the Brahmins and other Hindus.





The significant differences between the Jaina and Buddhist universal histories may well help explain why Jainism has survived in India for more than twenty-five hundred years, whereas Buddhism gradually disappeared. The Buddhist universal history tended towards a syncretistic relationship with Hinduism, wherein, for example, the Buddhist Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara could be seen as the Hindu Siva Lokesvara (P. S. Jaini 1980:87). It also resulted in such cults as the Dharma cult in Bengal, and texts such as the *Sunya Samhita* of Oriya Vaisnavism. Hindu authors adopted the Buddha into the avatars, against which the Buddhists did not adequately fight back.

The Jainas, on the other hand, vigorously opposed Hindu attempts at absorption. Padmanabh Jaini (1977) has shown how the Jainas successfully resisted the Hindu attempts to incorporate Rsabhanatha into the avatars. Rather than ignore popular Hindu cult figures such as Krsna and Rama as the Buddhists did, the Jainas, through the *salaka purusa* framework, were able to portray them as Jainas, presenting the Jaina laity with alternative identifications for these figures.

The Jaina Puranas differ from much of the early Hindu mythic material, resembling rather the later sectarian rewritings of the Hindu myths. The Jaina Puranas are works in which the hand of the author is ever present, shaping his material in the light of his own purposes and beliefs. The Jaina authors were interested in telling good stories, but they were always more interested in communicating to their audience an argument for Jaina religion and morality. Thus, the Jaina Puranas were *caritras*, biographies, tales of the famous heroes: they were written to provide role models for the Jaina laity to emulate.

## Jaina Puranas in a Performative Context

Jaina Puranas, like their counterparts in the Hindu tradition, were not intended to be read silently at home by an individual the way a contemporary American reads a novel (or an academic article). The Puranas were (and are) performance texts and need to be seen in a performative context for their place within the Jaina tradition to be fully understood. 49

One of the major ways in which Jaina laity interact with the *sadhus* is through the sermons (*pravacana*, *vyakhyana*) given by the latter.50 The main time of the year when *sadhus* give sermons is during the *caturmasa*, the four-month period during the rainy season, from the full moon of Asadha (June-July) through the full





moon of Karttika (October-November), when all *sadhus* and *sadhvis* must cease their travelling (*vihara*) and remain in one place. Every morning during the *caturmasa* the *sadhus* give public sermons for all the local laity in the monastic residence (*upasraya*). These sermons last for at least one, and usually two, periods of forty-eight minutes, as many of the attending laity take the temporary vow (*vrata*) of *samayika*, in which they remain seated on a cloth, mendicant's broom in hand, and perform spiritual practices for these periods. The practices may consist of counting a special *mantra* on a 108- or 54-bead rosary, or it may consist merely in listening to the discourse of the *sadhu*.

*Sadhus* also give sermons at other times during the eight months of their travelling. Often a *sadhu* who is especially renowned for his sermons is invited by a local congregation to give a series of sermons on one text, lasting one or two weeks. The Jaina *Ramayana* and Jaina *Mahabharata* 51 are favorite topics for these special sermons, which are often advertized in the local newspapers.

At the beginning of the *caturmasa*, most *sadhus* announce one or two texts that they will read aloud and expound upon in their sermons. These are usually texts which the *sadhu* has previously studied, usually with his own guru. Sometimes the text is a Jaina Purana, but usually it is another collection of religiously edifying stories similar in form and style to a Jaina

Purana. Only rarely, in the case of a more scholarly *sadhu*, is the text chosen a philosophically oriented text, and even that is accompanied by a commentary that provides stories to demonstrate the philosophical point under discussion. But the bulk of the sermon almost always consists of stories of ideal Jainas of the past. As one *sadhu* said to me, "These are simple people. They are just merchants and businessmen. They cannot understand philosophy. But if we tell them the philosophy in the form of stories, then they can understand it."

The texts read in the sermons are usually either in Sanskrit or Prakrit, generally with a vernacular translation/summary and commentary (*sartha* or *artha sahita)*. The *sadhu* often also has handwritten notes on the text, written either when he studied the text with his guru, or during a previous *caturmasa* when as a junior *sadhu* he listened to his guru's sermons on the text. *Sadhus* who are renowned for their sermons are able to discourse at length without the aid of notes, and the ability of a *sadhu* to give interesting and inspiring sermons is an important factor in establishing his fame (*kirti*, *yasas*) among the laity.

When giving a sermon, the *sadhu* has a copy of the text on a bookstand in front of him. Nowadays the text is in printed form (although usually still in the traditional *pothi* shape, of unbound





pages about five inches by ten inches, rather than in modern bound-book shape). In earlier times, a wealthy layman would pay to have a handwritten copy of the text prepared for the *sadhu* as an act of devotion (*bhakti*) and gifting (*dana*) within the field of scripture (*agamaksetra*), one of the seven fields of suitable gifting. For certain texts there was also a tradition of painted illustration, 52 and the illustrated pages were held up for the audience to view as the *sadhu* read the text. A very wealthy patron might arrange for all or part of the text to be written in gold paint, a practice especially popular for the *Kalpa Sutra*.

The *sadhu* first reads from the root text, translates it into the vernacular, and then expounds upon the text, giving homilitic examples and quoting from other texts from memory as suits the occasion. *Sadhus* less skilled in giving sermons often just recite the vernacular commentary as printed, rushing along in a singsong voice that lulls some (or many) of the audience to sleep. Because of the need for detailed vernacular expositions on texts to be read by less capable *sadhus*, the expositions of some famous *sadhus* have been copied down and published either to be read aloud verbatim or to be studied by a *sadhu* in preparing for his own sermon. In former times, some tellings of texts by famous *sadhus* were written down at the request of a patron, either a wealthy merchant or a king, and preserved in the local manuscript storehouse (*bhandara*). Thus in many texts, such as the *Trisastisalakapurusacaritra*, the colophon will mention not only the author (Acarya Hemacandra) but also the patron of the text (in this example, Kumarapala of Anahillavada Pattana, the Caulukya Emperor), as well as the patron who paid for the copying of the manuscript. This practice explains the proliferation of retellings of the same stories by different authors over the centuries, so that there exist today in manuscript form dozens of different versions of different Jinacaritras and other Jaina Puranas that show very little variation from one composition to another.

But in almost all cases the authors were *sadhus*, and the Puranas have been largely an orthodox, *moksamarga* literature aimed at guiding the laity in proper religious conduct in the wider social world. This conduct is informed by the principles of Jaina ethics and ideally results in formal initiation (*diksa*) as a mendicant and eventually, after lifetimes spent wearing away accumulated *karma* through asceticism, in liberation.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have looked at various ways to characterize and define the Jaina Puranas. From an external perspective, they





are post-canonical biographical stories in *kavya* form. From an interval perspective, they can be divided into the three genres of the Jinacaritra, the Jaina *Ramayana*, and the Jaina *Harivamsa*, with the fourth genre of the Mahapurana encompassing all of them. Thus, a Jaina Purana is a *kavya* that narrates the biography of one or more of the sixty-three Great Heroes of the Jaina universal history. The lives of these heroes demonstrate the central negative and positive values of the Jaina tradition, and it is in significant part through the hearing and reading of these biographies as contained in the Puranas and similar texts that the Jainas have and continue to understand and internalize the values and karmic principles of the Jaina worldview.
Appendix 1 Principal Jaina Puranas

| CENTURY (ALL C.E.) | PADMA PURANA | HARIVAMSA PURANA | MAHAPURANA |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | | | |
| 2 | | | |
| 3 | Vimalasuri (Maharastri) | Vimalasuri (Maharastri) (lost) | |
| 4 | | | |
| 5 | | | |
| 6 | | | |
| 7 | Ravisena (Sanskrit) | | |
| 8 | | Punnata Jinasena (Sanskrit) | |
| | Svayambhu (Apabhramsa) | Svayambhu (Apabhramsa) | |
| 9 | | | Silanka (Maharastri) Jinasena/Gunabhadra (Sanskrit) |
| 10 | | Pampa (Kannada) | Puspadanta (Apabhramsa) Camundaraya (Kannada) |
| 11 | | | |
| 12 | Nagacandra (Kannada) | | Hemacandra (Sanskrit) |





Appendix 2 The Sixty-three Salaka Purusas

| TIRTHANKARA | CAKRAVARTIN | BALADEVA/VASUDEVA/ PRATI-VASUDEVA |
|---|---|---|
| 1Rsabha (Adi) | 1Bharata | |
| 2Ajita | 2Sagara | |
| 3Sambhava | | |
| 4Abhinandana | | |
| 5Sumati | | |
| 6Padmaprabha | | |
| 7Suparsva | | |
| 8Candraprabha | | |
| 9Suvidhi/Puspadanta | | |
| 10Sitala | | 1Vijaya/Triprstha/Asvagriva |
| 11Sreyamsa | | 2Acala/Dviprstha/Taraka |
| 12Vasupujya | | 3Dharma/Svayambhu/Madhu |
| 13Vimala | | 4Suprabha/Purusottama/ Madhusudana |
| 14Ananta | | |
| 15Dharma | | |
| | 3Maghavan | 5Sudarsana/Purusasimha/ Madhukrida |
| | 4Sanatkumara | |
| 16Santi | 5Santi | |
| 17Kunthu | 6Kunthu | |
| 18Ara | 7Ara | |
| | 8Subhauma | 6Nandisena/Pundarika/ Nisumbha |
| | | 7Nandimitra/Datta/Bali |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 19Malli | | |
| | | 8Rama (Padma)/Laksmana/ Ravana |
| 20Munisuvrata | 9Padma | |
| 21Nami | 10Harisena | |
| | 11Jayasena | |
| 22Nemi | | 9Balabhadra/Krsna/ |
| | 12Brahmadatta | Jarasandha |
| 23Parsva | | |
| 24Mahavira | | |

Based on Hemacandra, *Trisastisalakapurusacaritra.*





# 9
# Jaina Puranas: A Puranic Counter Tradition

*Padmanabh S. Jaini*

When discussing the Jaina Puranas and their relationship to the Brahminic Puranas, one is immediately struck by a metaphor that is readily understood by readers of Indological studies published in the early twentieth century. With rare exceptions, these works contain a large number of additions and corrections, which in turn need further additions and corrections, ad infinitum. Even a cursory glance at the Jaina Puranas makes it clear that the Jaina authors who composed them knew the Hindu Epics and Puranas well, studied them with the attention worthy of a board of censors examining the offensive portions of a story, and finally decided to rewrite the script in conformity with their own doctrines and sensibilities. To the credit of the Jainas, it must be said that they did not accomplish this project by any surreptitious means but instead, as will be seen below, achieved their goal by declaring openly that they were setting the record straight. For they alleged that certain narratives of these texts had been deliberately falsified by their adversaries, the Brahmins, proponents of the Vedic rituals and worshippers of such divinities as Brahma, Visnu, and Siva. For the Jainas who did not believe in a creator God, who rejected the efficacy of the Vedic and Tantric rituals, and who questioned the power of the Deity to grant salvation, the Puranic descriptions of the sport of these divinities was of no value whatsoever. Indeed, one might surmise that if the Puranas had been content only to extoll the virtues of





these gods, the Jainas probably would have ignored them as literature unfit for study by devout followers of the Jina, and of little consequence for their own creed. For the Jainas too had their own texts, called the Jinacaritas (biographies of their celebrated Tirthankaras), which could be expanded into popular narratives that could compete with the heretical Puranas.

What made the Jaina writers view these Hindu Puranas with hostility was the Brahminic attempt to appropriate such worldly heroes as Rama and Krsna, sanctify their secular lives, and set them up as divine incarnations of their god Visnu. The devotional movements that grew up around these so-called avatars threatened to overwhelm the Jaina laity, who mostly belonged to the affluent merchant castes, and there was the increasing danger that they might return to the Brahminic fold from which they had earlier been converted. Rama and Krsna originally figured as human heroes even in the Brahminic Epics, which extolled their righteous rulership or heroic victories and thus were acceptable to all Indians, regardless of religion or creed. But once the proponents of Vedic religion identified them with the Vedic god Visnu, the Jaina teachers seemed to have been faced with a difficult choice: either to accept the Brahminic version of history and forego their own identity as upholders of a different faith or to set forth a new version of these tales in which these two heroes would be integrated into the Jaina tradition and their magnificent lives would be made subservient to the holy careers of the Tirthankaras, the last of whom, namely, Vardhamana, was appropriately hailed as Mahavira, the Great Hero!

The legends of the Tirthankaras are as foreign to the Brahminic traditions as are the stories of the Vedic and Puranic divinities to the Jainas. But both traditions must have found something that could be profitably exploited to present their

own worldviews and ethical teachings in the historical accounts of Rama and Krsna, their mildly virtuous brothers Laksmana and Balarama, and their valorous adversaries, Ravana and Jarasandha, respectively. The Jaina authors, who may well have preserved a different recension of these accounts than the one handed down in the Brahminic tradition, might have then decided to portray these heroes in such a manner as would be consistent with their peculiar doctrines of *karma* and salvation. This probably explains both the complete absence of the category known as *itihasa* (Epic) in the Jaina literature and the presence of such unusual narrative texts as *Paümacariya* and *Pandava Purana*, names conspicuously absent from the traditional list of Brahminic Puranas. The Jaina Puranas





are thus distinguished from their Brahminic counterparts by their integration of the pan-Indian *itihasas* with the exclusively Jaina legends of the Tirthankaras, which span more than an entire eon (*kalpa*).

How and when this process of Jainizing the accounts of the Epic heroes began is a question that, strangely enough, has not yet been raised. But a glance at the beginnings of the Jaina Puranic literature 1 indicates that this trend towards assimilation could have begun only after the elevation of Krsna as an avatar of Visnu in the Brahminic Epics and Puranas. This hypothesis is based on the fact that in the Jaina texts the names Baladeva and Vasudeva are not restricted to the brothers otherwise known as Balarama and Krsna, the two Puranic avatars of Visnu; instead, they serve as names of two distinct classes of mighty brothers, who appear nine times in each half of the time cycles of the Jaina cosmology and jointly rule half the earth as half-Cakrins! The texts give us no clue as to how the Jainas arrived at such an extraordinary class of beings, conspicuously absent from the Brahminic mythology as well as the earlier strata of the Jaina canonical literature. But it is possible to trace their origin to certain earlier lists of s*alaka purusas*, "Illustrious Beings," appearing in the Jinacarita of the pontiff Bhadrabahu, who is said to have been a contemporary (and teacher) of Candragupta, the Mauryan emperor (ca. 330 B.C.E.). Incorporated in the famous *Kalpa Sutra*2 since very ancient times, this text contains a list of twenty-four Tirthankaras, beginning with Rsabha and ending with Vardhamana Mahavira, and contains a skeletal biography of these Supreme Teachers, with special emphasis on the five *kalyanas* or auspicious moments of their holy career, namely, conception (*garbha*), birth (*janma*), renunciation (*diksa*), enlightenment (*kevalajnana*) and death (*nirvana)*.

The Therevada list of the twenty-five Buddhas (with Siddhartha Gautama as the last), given in the *Buddhavamsa*,3 was also probably formulated in the post-Mauryan period. Both of these Sramanic lists predate the lists of the Dasavataras and the still larger lists of the Amsvataras found in the later Puranas.4 At some time soon after the compilation of the Jinacarita, the Jaina teachers seem to have drawn up a similar list of Cakravartins, next only to their Tirthankaras in glory, as is suggested by the example of Bharata, the eldest son of the first Tirthankara Rsabha. Bharata appears in the Jaina canon as an ideal layman and a king, upholder of the Jaina law of nonviolence or noninjury (*ahimsa*), the first Cakravartin of this eon, from whom was derived the name *Bharatavarsa*, the continent of India. The list contained the following names of twelve such





Cakravartins, appropriately, half the number of the Tirthankaras, who claimed to be the Lords of Six Continents (*satkhandaadhipati*), 5 of which only the first two can be traced to the Brahminic Puranas: (1) Bharata, (2) Sagara, (3) Maghavan, (4) Sanatkumara, (5) Santi, (6) Kunthu, (7) Ara, (8) Subhauma (9) Mahapadma, (10) Harisena, (11) Jayasena, and (12) Brahmadatta.

It is said that three of these twelve Cakravartins, namely, Santi, Kunthu and Ara, played the role of a Cakravartin as well as that of a Tirthankara, thus effectively reducing the number of Cakravartins to nine, a figure that will serve as a model in preparing other categories of the Illustrious Beings as well. Of the remaining nine, six Cakravartins, following the example of Bharata, renounced the world to become Jaina mendicants and attained release (*moksa*) after their death. Two, however, Subhauma and Brahmadatta, ruled unrighteously and were reborn in hell. It is evident that the Jaina list of Cakravartins made provision for bringing into the Jaina fold both virtuous heroes and villainous tyrants, in order to illustrate the Jaina doctrine of karmic justice as well as the path of salvation.

The hero as a spiritual victor, or Jina (an epithet claimed in ancient times for both the Buddha and Mahavira), and as a supreme ruler, or Cakravartin, were categories that originated in the Sramanic traditions of the Gangetic valley. In compiling the lists of these two kinds of "heroes," therefore, the Jainas were not influenced by Brahminic mythology or literary models. But the categories of Baladevas and Vasudevas are unknown to the Buddhist tradition and, as noted earlier, cannot be traced to the earlier strata of the Jaina canon. The introduction of these novel categories in the Jaina tradition, therefore,

cannot be explained without reference to the myths surrounding the two popular cultic figures of the Vaisnava tradition, namely, Balarama and his younger brother, Krsna of Mathura.

Archeological remains found in the region of Mathura and literary references appearing in such works as that of the grammarian Patanjali support the fact that the popularity of these two cultic figures had reached its zenith in the Mauryan and the Sunga period and that the Bhagavata religion had become widespread in Mathura and the Western India. This period coincides with the large scale migration of Jainas from Magadha to Mathura, where they flourished for several centuries, and their subsequent journeys to Punjab, Rajasthan, and Gujarat, and thence to the Deccan. It seems probable that close contact of their laypeople with the votaries of these cultic figures might have induced the Jaina *acaryas* to devise means of integrating them with the Jaina tradition. There probably





existed a canonical tradition that their twenty-second Tirthankara, Nemi, was a prince of the Yadava clan and that he was a cousin of Balarama and Krsna. 6 By accepting the Brahminic myths associated with these two heroes, albeit modified to suit the Jaina sensibilities, and by making them subservient to the Tirthankara Nemi, the Jainas could claim that these two popular heroes had actually once been members of the Jaina community and had, in these degenerate times, been falsely claimed by the Brahmins as incarnations of their god Visnu. Several ancient (probably Kusana) images depicting the Tirthankara Nemi on a high pedestal flanked by the figures of Balarama and Krsna, now preserved in the Mathura Museum, attest to the credibility of our hypotheses.7

But Balarama and Krsna were not the only human avatars of Visnu: long before them another pair of illustrious brothers had flourished; these brothers, Rama and Laksmana, also had been appropriated by the Brahmins as incarnations of the same deity appearing on earth to vanquish the demon Ravana. The coincidence of finding two such pairs of brothers, deeply attached to each other and fighting the same enemy, must have played some part in suggesting to the Jaina authors the possibility of devising newer categories of Illustrious Beings as a supplement to their lists of the Tirthankaras and Cakravartins.

The designations of these new categories of heroes, the Baladevas and Vasudevas, are clearly adaptations of the personal names of the two Yadava brothers, Balarama and Krsna, respectively. The Jaina texts are ambiguous in defining their precise roles, but the intention of the a*caryas* seems to be to depict the one (the Baladeva) as leading the life of an ideal Jaina layman, subsequently renouncing the world to become a Jaina monk, and to portray the other (the Vasudeva) as the hero's companion, who is capable of carrying out terrible destruction regardless of the evil consequences that may ensue. They are often described as the joint sovereigns of half the earth (half-Cakrins), who play out their respective roles only during those long intervals when a Cakravartin, the ruler of the whole earth, may not appear. They are nine pairs of brothers born of the same father but different mothers; the elder brothers are the Baladevas and the younger are the Vasudevas. All of the Baladevas fit the stereotype of Balarama: like him they are white in complexion and can be recognized because they carry the weapon that characterized him, the plough (*aparajita-hala*). Because of this, they are also known as "Halabhrts."8 The following names appear in the list of Baladevas: Vijaya, Acala, Dharma, Suprabha, Sudarsana, Nandisena, Nandimitra, Rama (also called Padma), and Balarama.





It should be noted here that Rama, the hero of the *Ramayana*, is reckoned as a Baladeva and, hence, is referred to by the Jaina Puranas as Halabhrt, although no Brahminic account designates him as such.

All of the Vasudevas are modeled after the descriptions of Krsna found in the Brahminic Puranas. They are blue-black (*nila*) in complexion and are designated by several names applied exclusively to Krsna in the Brahminic tradition, for example, Kesava, Madhava, Govinda, Visnu, Janardana, and, most importantly, Narayana, which is used regularly as a synonym for the generic name Vasudeva. The Vasudevas are said to remain young forever, without growing facial hair, and come to possess the following seven gems (*ratnas*): the wheel (*sudarsana-cakra*), the mace (*kaumudi-gada*), the sword (*saunandaka-asi*), the missile (*amogha-sakti*), the bow (*sarnga-dhanu*), the conch (*pañcajanya-sankha*), and the diamond (*kaustubha-mani*). 9 The following names appear in the list of Vasudevas: Triprstha, Dviprstha, Svayambhu, Purusottama, Purusasimha, Purusapundarika, Datta, Laksmana, and Krsna. The noteworthy feature of this list is that it includes Laksmana; the son of Dasaratha thus gets the appellation Vasudeva (literally, "son of Vasudeva"), a title never applied to him in the Brahminic texts.

The two lists above are accompanied by a complementary list of the Prati-vasudevas, or Prati-narayanas, the deadly adversaries of the Vasudevas.10 This list includes: Asvagriva, Taraka, Madhu, Madhusudana, Madhukrida, Nisumbha, Bali, Ravana, and Jarasandha. Ravana and Jarasandha are, of course, immediately recognizable; and the other Prati-vasudevas, unlike the members of the other two categories of heroes, are not altogether unfamiliar. Some of them are names of demons (*asuras*) destroyed by Visnu in his various avatars. In the Jaina Puranas, however, they are presented as *vidyadharas*, men possessing great magic powers but given to excessive forms of greed, lust (as in the case of Ravana), or envy (as in the case of Jarasandha). It is said that a Prati-vasudeva has nursed a deep enmity against a Vasudeva in previous lives and that the accumulated hatred culminates in a tremendous battle of cosmic proportions during his present incarnation. Further, it is believed that the wheel-gem called "*sudarsana*" first appears miraculously in the armory of the Prati-vasudeva, tempting him to challenge the Vasudeva, his predestined enemy, to battle. However, partly because of the Baladeva's power of merit, but mainly because of the invincible valor of the Vasudeva, the wheel-gem fails to kill him when hurled by the Prati-vasudeva in his direction. Instead, it comes of its





own accord into the hands of the Vasudeva, who throws it at the Prati-vasudeva and beheads him; thereupon the Vasudeva is hailed by gods and men as a half-Cakrin, the Lord of the Three Continents (Trikhandadhipati). Pursued by his evil *karma*, the Prati-vasudeva is reborn in hell but, in due course, becomes a human being, follows the Jaina path, and attains *moksa*.

As was also the case with the Prati-vasudevas, the class names Baladeva and Vasudeva, the epithets used in describing the gods, and their personal names leave no room for doubting that the Jaina authors had deliberately embarked upon a project of producing grand narratives that would run parallel to those popularized by the Vaisnavites. However, in retelling their versions the Jaina authors shrewdly made a major change that was to accomplish at a single stroke both the elevation of Rama to the status of a Jaina saint and the consignment of Krsna to hell. Both of these incarnations of Visnu should have been accorded equal status, since both had successful vanquished demonic forces and thereby had accomplished the avowed purpose of an avatar. Yet, employing their discriminatory wisdom, the Jainas raised Rama to the benevolent category of a Baladeva by freeing him from the dreadful task of killing Ravana. Instead, the Jainas chose to have this destruction occur at the hands of Laksmana and thus cast him, together with Krsna, in the role of the brave but malevolent Vasudeva. They were then free to declare quite candidly that in accordance with the inscrutable laws of *karma*, all Baladevas had attained *moksa* (with the exception of Balarama, who had been reborn in heaven), while their brothers the Vasudevas were condemned to hell for having violently killed their archenemies, the Prati-vasudevas, in fulfillment of a long-cherished evil aspiration (*nidana*) from past lives. 11

This would appear to be the process by which the "corrections" introduced by the Jainas into the Brahminic accounts of the Epic heroes occurred. In the course of time, even these Jainized versions would receive further modifications at the hands of zealous sectarian authors. Additional lists, such as that of the nine Naradas12 (Jaina counterparts of the Brahminic sage of that name, they were the instigators of strife between the Vasudevas and the Prati-vasudevas) and that of the eleven Rudras13 (apostate Jaina mendicants who would misuse their occult powers) appeared, making the narratives as edifying and entertaining as those of their rivals. Thus is explained the origin of the sixty-three Illustrious Beings14 (*salaka purusas*: twenty-four Tirthankaras, twelve Cakravartins, nine Baladevas, nine Vasudevas, and nine Prati-vasudevas), who comprised





the subject matter of the Jaina versions of the *itihasas* and Puranas, an amalgamation of narratives pertaining to both the Spiritual Victors (Jinas) and the worldly heroes of the land of Bharatavarsa.

Just as the traditional eighteen Puranas, together with the Epics, are considered *smrti*s, which were subservient in their authority to the *sruti*s, or Vedic literature, the Jaina Puranic literature is also relegated to a position secondary to that of the Jaina canon, known as the Purvas and Angas. These latter two are said to have proceeded from the mouth of the Tirthankara Mahavira and to have been handed down in the oral tradition through the lineage of the Ganadharas, the immediate mendicant disciples of Mahavira, and, in a subsequent period, the a*carya*s. According to Jaina tradition, the subject matter of the Puranas, namely, the sixty-three Illustrious Beings, was included in the section called the "Purvas" (Ancient Ones), which seems to be a Jaina synonym for the Purana itself. However, the Purva became extinct soon after the death of Mahavira; according to unanimous Jaina tradition, the last person to retain the memory of a portion of it was the mendicant Bhadrabahu, the chief pontiff of the Jaina mendicant community prior to the emergence of the Digambaras and the

Svetambaras, two rival sects. Both traditions agree that he was a contemporary of Candragupta, the first Mauryan king, who flourished around 330 B.C.E.

After the death of Bhadrabahu the split between the two sects was so severe that each of them refused to acknowledge the authenticity of the scriptures that had been received in the other's tradition; and each eventually set up its own canonical, commentarial, and narrative literature in conformity with its own sectarian beliefs. Therefore, despite the fact that the contents of the Jaina Puranas are traced to the now extinct Purvas, the literature that has grown through the ages is a development that began several centuries after the death of Mahavira and was imbued with a sectarian spirit from its very inception. Both the Digambaras, who claimed that the entire Anga canon was also lost, and the Svetambaras, who asserted that a great deal of it was preserved in their tradition, devised a new category of scripture, *anuyoga* (literally, "Additional Questions" [asked of Mahavira]), which was in four parts. The first of these, simply called the *prathamanuyoga*, was devoted to the biographies of the twenty-four Jinas of the present half of the Jaina time cycle (the Avasarpini, or "Descending" half), to which were added, as we saw above, the narratives of the remaining *salaka purusas*, forming the present-day Puranas of the Jaina community. Thus what we have available under the rubric of the Jaina Puranas are two sets of





sectarian narratives, each purporting to describe accurately a single set of the lives of the sixty-three Illustrious Beings.

Unlike the Brahminic Puranas, most of which are of unknown authorship and in Sanskrit, all of the Jaina Puranas have well-known authors and are available in Sanskrit, Prakrit, and Apabhramsa as well. As a matter of fact, the earliest extant Jaina Purana is in Maharashtri Prakrit, composed probably in conformity with the Jaina belief that Prakrit was the sacred language in which the words of Mahavira were preserved. However, this earliest narrative work is neither labelled as a "Purana" nor named after a Tirthankara. Instead, as the title *Paümacariya* 15 would indicate, it is a *cariya* (Sanskrit *carita*), a "biography," a term rather close to the designation *itihasa*, and celebrates the life of Padma, a Jaina name for Rama, the eighth Vasudeva of Jaina mythology, who was none other than the hero of Valmiki's *Ramayana*. The author of this work, Vimalasuri, is said to have been a mendicant of the Digambara sect. According to the colophon preserved in the text, the work was completed in the year 530 after the death of Mahavira; this corresponds to the fourth year of the common era. However, the linguistic study of the text has led scholars such as Hermann Jacobi and K. R. Chandra to place it in the third or fourth century C.E. The entire work is divided into 118 sections and consists of 8,651 *gathas*, which can be considered equivalent to about twelve thousand *slokas* in extent; it is probably the earliest and longest poetical work extant in Prakrit.

There is probably no connection between the title *Paumacariya*, and the *Padma Purana*, one of the eighteen Brahminic Puranas. The word *padma* in the title of latter work does not refer to Rama, as it does in the Jaina work, but rather to the lotus shape of the earth after its recreation at the beginning of a new evolutionary cycle (*sarga*).16 Vimalasuri's choice of the name *Padma* over the more familiar *Rama* and *Raghava* (names that were not unknown to him) may be considered an attempt to assert a Jaina identity for a work on the hero of the *Ramayana*. This should not, however, mislead us into believing that the *Paümacariya* is merely a Jaina story of Rama, for the work essentially covers all of the *salaka purusas*, who flourished from the time of Rsabha, the first Tirthankara, up to that of the twentieth Tirthankara, Munisuvrata, in whose regime (*tirtha* or *sasana*), roughly corresponding to the second Brahminic *yuga*, the actual story of Rama took place. This becomes evident when we analyze the contents of the book's 118 chapters. The first 24 describe the Illustrious Beings who flourished before the time of Rama; the next 61 chapters are devoted to the exploits of the brothers Rama





and Laksmana, the eighth Baladeva and Vasudeva, respectively, and end the account with their coronation in Ayodhya after the destruction of Ravana, the eighth Prati-vasudeva. In the remaining 33 chapters the poet describes the events following the banishment of Sita; these events lead up to the death of Laksmana and Rama's renunciation and attainment of *moksa*.

The introductory portions of the *Paümacariya* reveal quite openly the purpose of writing the story: the presentation of a Jaina account of the tale of Rama that should be seen as a deliberate rejection of the Brahminic version of the same story. The *Cariya* opens with a scene depicting Srenika, the king of Magadha, approaching Lord Mahavira in the holy assembly and asking him questions about the veracity of the accounts of Rama and Ravana that he has heard from "*kusastra-vadins*" (expounders of false scriptures), a reference undoubtedly to the Brahminic version of that story. It should be remembered that Srenika was a recent convert to Jainism through his wife Cellana, an aunt of Mahavira. The king is therefore an

excellent instrument for the Jainas to use as an interlocutor, especially where there was an occasion to point out the beliefs of the heretics that needed to be examined. It is not surprising, therefore, that the king reaffirms his faith in Jainism by showing his disbelief in accounts he heard formerly, in which Ravana and his brothers were demons (*raksasas*) or given to the eating of flesh or in which Ravana defeated Indra, the king of gods, and yet had his powerful armies defeated by a bunch of monkeys (*vanaras*)! Srenika is specific in pointing his finger at the source of this travesty as he sees it: "The poets have composed the *Ramayana* with perverse contents, like the killing of a lion by a deer or like the destruction of an elephant by a dog . . All this appears to me to be lies, contrary to reasoning, and not worthy of belief by wise men." 17

These and other similar questions raised by Srenika provide an opportunity for the Jaina author to put forth a new story of Rama as it was originally narrated by the Omniscient Jina to the king, and as the author had received it in the tradition of the *acaryas*. But the story proper will not begin until the king is given a detailed account of the lineage (*vamsa*) in which the hero Rama was born, and that tale is closely connected with the origin of civilization at the start of a new time cycle. Thus a full discourse on the Jaina concept of time and space or the universe, known as *samsara*, is required to be unfolded for the king to appreciate properly the place of Rama in the Jaina history of the world. It is by this circuitous method that Vimalasuri introduces the Purana topics known to us as creation, destruction, ancient dynasties, epochs of the Manus, and later dy-





nasties. These *pañcalaksanas*, the five characteristics of the Brahminic Puranas, thus become guidelines for the Jaina Puranas as well, albeit under different headings. They provide the Jainas with a new opportunity to expound their worldview, especially in the contexts of their independent cosmology, the beginning of civilization in our epoch, and the founding of the Jaina order of monks, from which would rise the most holy of the Illustrious Beings, the Tirthankaras and their eminent lay devotees.

Having thus provided a brief but essential outline of the Jaina doctrine pertaining to time, space, and the movement of souls therein, and having narrated in brief form the narratives of the twenty Tirthankaras, the nine Cakravartins, and the seven previous sets of the Baladevas, Vasudevas, and Prati-vasudevas, Vimalasuri launches the story of Padma, the Jaina version of Rama, the son of Dasaratha. The story itself does not differ significantly from the version given in the Valmiki *Ramayana*; 18 the changes are more in the details of the plot or in the incredible descriptions of the secondary characters that had so confused the king (and, no doubt, many others who had heard it)! Ravana, in the Jaina version, is not a demon but a Jaina layman who has mastered certain magic powers (*vidyas*), is hailed as a *vidyadhara*, and has at his command a large host of other such beings to help him in his ambition to rule the world. Even the monkeys of the *Ramayana*, namely, Bali and Sugriva, are here declared to be *vidyadharas*, with Hanuman enjoying the additional distinction of being a God of Love (Kamadeva), possessing a large harem of most beautiful women, yet destined to become a Jaina monk and attain *moksa* in that very life.

Vimalasuri also very cleverly employs the Jaina motif of renunciation in order to rectify some of the wrongs done to certain eminent heroines of the Epic. Kaikeyi, for example, has been portrayed by Valmiki as a selfish woman wantonly demanding the kingdom for her son Bharata; in the Jaina version she is made to appear rather more like a concerned mother anxious to keep her son with her. In the Jaina story, Dasaratha seriously contemplates renouncing the world to become a Jaina monk; when the young Bharata hears of this, he becomes determined to follow his father into the forest and to assume the vows of a Jaina mendicant. Kaikeyi cannot bear the loss of both husband and son and believes that Bharata could be lured back to household life if he were offered the kingdom. Dasaratha readily agrees to thisin payment of the boon he has previously promised herand informs Rama of his decision, whereupon the noble Rama obeys his father's will and proceeds to the forest of his own accord, accompanied by Sita and Laksmana.





The motif of renunciation becomes even more appropriate in the treatment of Sita: in the Brahminic version, Sita ends her life by what is euphemistically called "entering the earth," that is, committing suicide by falling into a pit. In Jainism, retribution for such a death is instantaneous rebirth in hell. The Jainas probably were determined not to make her suffer beyond what she had already undergone; in the Jaina version she renounces the world to become a Jaina nun as soon as her sons have been united with their estranged father. We have already alluded to the story of the death of Ravana, the Prati-vasudeva, at the hands of Laksmana the Vasudeva, and their rebirth in hell as a consequence of their violent activities. We are told that Sita, after performing great austerities, is reborn in heaven as a male god; having discovered by means of her

supernatural knowledge the fallen state of these two heroes, she visits them in their hell and admonishes them to give up their long-cherished enmity. As for Rama, the supreme hero of the *Paümacariya*, he transcends both heaven and hell by renouncing worldly life to become a Jaina mendicant and becomes a Siddha, a Perfected and Omniscient Being, at the end of his mortal life.

It may be pertinent to ask whether indeed Vimalasuri was influenced in his depiction of the story of Rama and Laksmana by the Puranic narratives of Balarama and Krsna, who, as we have suggested, were the models for the Jaina categories of Baladeva and Vasudeva, respectively. Since the story of Rama ends long before the advent of the twenty-second Tirthankara, Nemi (a cousin of Balarama and Krsna in the Jaina tradition), Vimalasuri's story does not include these latter heroes, but there is a rather insignificant detail in the *Paümacariya* that does betray such an influence. It is well known that in the Puranic texts Krsna is said to have had sixteen thousand wives; this tradition is very much a part of the folklore surrounding the Krsna myth even to this day. As we have seen earlier, Krsna and Laksmana are both called "Vasudevas" (or "Narayanas") in Jaina mythology. Since the descriptions of these two heroes have been almost identical in many respects, one would expect that Laksmana in the Jaina tradition would be found to have had a similar number of wives. One is therefore not surprised to find that the *Paümacariya* and the subsequent Jaina narratives about Laksmana do indeed describe him as having sixteen thousand wives, with Rama and Balarama having only half as many wives as their younger brothers, the Vasudevas! 19

Obviously the Jaina authors did not think much of Rama's alleged virtue of monogamy as extolled in the Brahminic *Ramayana*. Or, most probably, they found it expedient to make this





change in order to establish uniformity with regard to the descriptions of these two pairs of Baladevas and Vasudevas; this principle would be extended later to all of the remaining pairs of these two classes of heroes. Rama's single wife certainly would have looked extraordinary in contrast to his brother's thousands of spouses. The excessive number of wives attributed to Rama might also serve better to emphasize the greater degree of his detachment when the time of his renunciation would arrive. In the case of Laksmana, however, as a Vasudeva he was destined to be reborn in hell; hence his excessive indulgence in carnal pleasures would only contribute to his inevitable fate.

Vimala's Prakrit *Paümacariya* became the standard text for a great many Jaina compositions on the life of Rama. Most noteworthy of these is the Sanskrit *Padma-Carita* in eighteen thousand *slokas*, completed in 676 C.E. by the Digambara mendicant Ravisena. 20 Ravisena's Sanskrit rendering with added embellishments inspired the composition of Sanskrit Purana works by a large number of Jaina poets, in both the Digambara and Svetambara sects, as well as two Puranas in Apabhramsa by two Digambara laymen, one the eighth-century Svayambhu21 and another the eleventh-century Puspadanta.22

The *Paümacariya* bore the name of Padma, that is, Rama, because this hero flourished at a time when there was no living Tirthankara; hence a Baladeva, a *salaka purusa* of a lesser order, could be elevated to the position of the supreme hero of this text. In the case of Krsna and Balarama, however, a similar elevation could not be effected, because the Yadava brothers were contemporaries, indeed, cousins of the twenty-second Tirthankara, Nemi (also called Aristanemi or Neminatha). The second stage in the development of the Jaina Puranas, therefore, begins ostensibly as a description of the advent of this Jina Nemi and only secondarily as that of the Epic heroes Balarama and Krsna. Since all three of these heroes were born in the great Hari dynasty (of which the Yadus were a prominent branch), a Purana named after that lineage could readily encompass the narratives of a Tirthankara and of the two lesser Epic heroes as well. It is therefore fitting that the Prakrit *Paümacariya* should be succeeded by a text entitled *Harivamsa Purana*, composed in 783 C.E., in Saurashtraa Vaisnavite strongholdby a Digambara mendicant, [Punnata] Jinasena.23

Whether the Jaina author owed his title to the *Harivamsa Parva*,24 an appendix to the *Mahabharata*, is a question that cannot be answered with certainty. There is no doubt, however, that both narratives share a great many common episodes, especially ones





that concern the life of Krsna and that of his sister Ekanasa. Even so, there are a great many other characters in the Hari lineage who do not come under the purview of the *Harivamsa Parva*. One notable example is Krsna's father, Vasudeva,

whom the Jainas consider to be one of the twenty-four Kamadevas of our time cycle. 25 For reasons that are not clear to us, the Jainas of Jinasena's time were more fascinated by this old character than by his more charismatic adolescent son, who wandered the pastures of Mathura! A great work called *Vasudeva-hindi* (Travels of Vasudeva), in two parts of eleven thousand and eighteen thousand verses, respectively, was composed as early as the fifth century C.E. in Maharashtri Prakrit by the two Svetambara mendicant authors Sanghadasagani and Dharmadasagani.26 The entire work was devoted to narratives concerning the amorous exploits of its hero, Vasudeva, who wandered all over India for a hundred years and won the hands of numerous women in marriage. Such a work, however, could not qualify as a Purana, since Vasudeva was only a Kamadeva and, as such, could not be a part of the traditional list of the *salaka purusas*. Jinasena's *Harivamsa Purana*, therefore, affords him a fresh opportunity to bring together a great many such related episodes (*akhyanas*) and to weave them into the more prominent narratives of the officially accepted heroes. In this manner, the *Harivamsa Purana* grew to be a treasure-house of information on such miscellaneous items as music (Sangita-sastra), dance (Samudrika-sastra), and art (Silpa-sastra), to mention only a fewa Jaina encyclopedia, as it were, in the manner of the Brahminic Puranas.

With regard to form, however, Jinasena closely follows the pattern established earlier by Vimalasuri. His work also begins with King Srenika's visit to the assembly of Mahavira, where the king asks a question about a contemporary, King Jitasatru, a scion of the Hari's clan who had recently died as a Jaina saint. In response, Mahavira, through his interlocutor Gautama, narrates the origin of the Hari dynasty, preceded by a description of other illustrious dynasties, notably the Iksvaku and the Kuru, in which had been born a great many Tirthankaras and other *salaka purusas*. The first seventeen chapters of the *Harivamsa Purana* are thus devoted to the description of the notable events that took place during the regimes of the first twenty-one Tirthankaras, culminating with that of Nemi, during whose time the Yadava branch of the Hari dynasty came into being.

In the eighteenth chapter the author sets forth the family tree of the ten Yadava brothers, the Vrsnis, of whom King Samudravijaya, the father of Tirthankara Nemi, was the oldest, and Vasudeva,





the father of Balarama and Krsna, the youngest. One might expect the Purana to proceed at this point with the narrative of the Jina Nemi, yet the author finds it necessary to devote a full twelve chapters to describing the amorous pursuits of Vasudeva. The poetic accounts of Krsna's rapturous amorous activities with the *gopis* and other women is well known to us through the *Harivamsa Parva* and the *Bhagavata Purana*. One wonders if the Jainas, in portraying the father rather than the son in this manner, were not attempting to deflect attention away from Krsna, the popular god of medieval India. Perhaps freeing Krsna from the debaucheries otherwise attributed to him in the Brahminic Puranas made it possible for the Jainas to accept him as one of their own heroes, dignified enough to share the company of other *salaka purusas!* Be that as it may, the actual story of Nemi, Krsna, and Balarama thus begins only in the thirty-third chapter, almost exactly at the midpoint of the *Harivamsa Purana*.

The narrative pertaining to Krsna gives the Jaina authors an excellent opportunity to introduce the episode of the *Mahabharata* war between the Pandavas and their cousins, the Kauravas. The Pandavas were maternal cousins of Krsna (sons of his aunts Kunti and Madri), and their family strife made Krsna's participation necessary for their victory in the war against the faction of Duryodhana. Here, too, the Jainas have effected a great many changes in the *Mahabharata* story: excising entirely those parts that were offensive to them (such as Vyasa's begetting children by Levirate appointment [*niyoga*] on the widows Ambika and Ambalika) or modifying other stories, such as that of Kunti's obtaining children by the help of gods or the polyandry of Draupadi. 27 Nor did the Jainas have Krsna appear in the great war as a charioteer for Arjuna preaching his Divine Song, the *Bhagavad Gita*, but instead only as an instigator and an advocate of bravery in warfare.

The narrative pertaining to the untimely renunciation of Nemi (on the eve of his marriage) and his attainment of Jinahood dominates the rest of the work. The Purana concludes with the description of Krsna's death at the hands of his step-brother Jarakumara (as in the *Bhagavata* story); the renunciation of Balarama and the five Pandava brothers, together with their innumerable spouses, including Satyabhama and Draupadi; their rigorous austerities; and the attainment of heaven by everyone except Krsna, who, alas, being a Vasudeva, was born in the same hell where his archenemy Jarasandha, the last Prati-vasudeva, had been dispatched by him earlier in the great war!

There are five principal characters who stand out in Jinasena's

rendering of the Krsna narrative. Of these, Nemi is an entirely Jaina character and does not figure in the Brahminic accounts. We have already remarked on the relatively excessive amount of attention paid by the Jainas to Vasudeva, the father of Krsna and Balarama. Before we turn to further modifications made by the Jainas in the stories of the latter two heroes, we may pause here to take into account a very important Jaina narrative pertaining to Krsna's sister. She does not play a major role in the Brahminic narratives, either in the *Harivamsa Parva* or in the *Bhagavata Purana*. But Jinasena's version, for reasons that will become evident, devotes an entire chapter to the unfolding of her rather tragic life. This sister of Krsna, Ekanamsa, who is worshipped as a personification of Durga, appears probably for the first time in the *Harivamsa Parva* in connection with the birth of Krsna. 28

According to this account, Lord Visnu asked his Yogamaya to be born as a daughter to the cowherd couple Nanda and Yasoda at the time when he himself was to be born to Devaki as Krsna. It was foreseen that this daughter of Yasoda would be exchanged for Devaki's son, Krsna. Accordingly, she was brought home to Mathura by Vasudeva and placed by the side of Devaki, who did not know of the exchange and believed that she had given birth to a daughter. Kamsa, expecting the birth of Krsna as foretold by the sage Narada, went to Devaki's side; when he realized that the baby was a female, he grabbed it and, out of spite, smashed it to pieces by hurling it against a rock. Of course, this was no ordinary infant; she rose immediately into the sky, appeared in the fully divine form of a goddess and warned Kamsa of his impending doom. She made her abode in the Vindhya mountains and was known as Devi Ekanamsa, an epiphany of Durga, a guardian deity of hunters and other hill-dwelling tribals, from whom she received offerings of flesh and blood.29 The author of the *Harivamsa Parva* does not explain explicitly why she had to be the chosen deity of hunters, but probably it was not considered an inappropriate role for a woman who had, after all, been born into a lower-caste cowherd family.

The Jainas probably could have chosen to ignore this story entirely or could have dismissed it with only a brief account of her death at the hands of Kamsa, similar to the earlier accounts of Kamsa killing Krsna's six brothers, born to Devaki before him. But the Jainas must have seen here an excellent opportunity to educate at least their own devotees, if not also the Vaisnavites (who believed this story to be literally true), about the error of the Brahminic accounts of her becoming a bloodthirsty goddess. The name Ekanamsa is rarely used elsewhere but is attested for the first time





in the *Harivamsa Parva*, where it is used as a synonym for such epithets of Durga as Katyayani, Parvati, Narayani, Vindhyavasini, and so on, and where she is depicted as favoring devotees who propitiate her with flesh and blood. Yet in this same text she is also called an "Arya," 30 a term that is used among the Jainas for a nun (*sadhvi*), a circumstance that probably explains the peculiarly Jaina ending of her story.

The word Ekanamsa, literally meaning "the single portionless one," itself does not appear in Jinasena's work, but there can be no doubt that this obscure name must have inspired the Jaina story of Krsna's sister called, instead, "Ekanasa." Ekanasa literally means "one having a single nose," (that is, nostril) and sounds a great deal like Ekanamsa; and it is not unlikely that by the time of Jinasena this goddess had come to be known by that name, at least among the lower classes of her worshippers, and was not therefore a purely Jaina invention. Jinasena very ingeniously utilizes this name to construct a counter story to that of the *Harivamsa Parva*.

According to his version, adopted by all succeeding Jaina writers, Ekanasa was not a goddess but the daughter of the herdsman Nanda and his wife Yasoda. As in the Brahminic story she was brought to Mathura in exchange for Krsna. In the Jaina story, however, Kamsa does not kill the female infant. At first, Kamsa thinks that a woman could be no threat to him, but later he reflects that her future husband might well become his enemy; therefore he disfigures her face by pounding on her nose. As a result of this she came to be known as Ekanasa, "one with a single nostril," or Cippita-nasika, "one with a crushed nose." This girl grew to become a voluptuous maiden, but because of her hideously deformed nose she was mocked by all and remained without a suitor. It is said that in the full prime of her youth, as she was admiring herself in a mirror, the young sons of Balarama passed by her and ridiculed her nose, called her by the hated epithet Cippita-nasika and ran away, laughing derisively at her.31 Stung by this ridicule, Ekanasa (whose real name is not given anywhere by Jinasena or other authors) went crying to a Jaina mendicant and begged him to reveal the past *karma* that had brought this misfortune upon her. Perceiving her past life, the monk told her that in a previous birth she had been a very handsome man, proud of his looks and heedless and cruel. Feeling disgust for a Jaina monk seated in meditation, he drove his cart against him and caused him to fall and break his nose. The misfortunes in her present life were retributions for her act of willful mischief against a holy man.

Moved deeply by this story of her past life, Ekanasa, full of





remorse, renounced the world while still a maiden and became a Jaina nun under the guidance of Suvrata, a nun superior. Wandering from place to place with her teacher, she traveled far from Mathura and entered the forests of Vindhya. There she dedicated herself entirely to the most extreme forms of austerities and sat day and night in meditation in isolated forests and on mountaintops. One day, while she was seated rapt in meditation, an army of hunters from that forest who were marching forth together to rob a caravan happened to see her in that position under a tree. Thinking her to be the deity of the forest (*vanadevata*), they greeted her, asked a boon of protection from her, and pledged to be her slaves and devotees if they were to be successful in their venture. While they were gone, a lion attacked her; the nun Ekanasa quietly suffered the terrible violence, died peacefully, and was reborn in heaven. When the hunters returned to the site after their successful expedition, they found only a great deal of blood on the place where she had been seated and not a trace of her body, other than three pieces of her fingers. The hunters, who were not instructed in the true religion of nonviolence (*ahimsa*), believed that the goddess had disappeared but that she must take delight in blood, since it was in evidence everywhere. Worshipping the three pieces of fingers as emblems of the goddess, they offered her sacrifices of their domestic animals, such as goats and buffaloes.

Thus began, according to the Jaina *Harivamsa Purana*, the horrible worship of this goddess Vindhyavasini, the cruel "guardian deity" of the heretics! Having narrated this account, entitled "Durgotpatti-varnana," Jinasena warns the Jaina laymen of the dangers of listening to false scriptures, worshipping the wrong gods, and indulging in the manifold stupidities of the world (*lokamudhata*) practiced in the name of *dharma*! 32 Ekanasa does not appear again in Jinasena's narrative, but her depiction here as a cruelly deformed woman sitting in unshakable meditation even at the moment of her death makes her probably a unique example of a heroine (*vira*) among the many Puranic accounts of male heroes.

Returning to the main hero of the *Harivamsa Purana*, the "Vasudeva" Krsna, one finds that Jinasena retains a great many of the accounts of his childhood as narrated in the *Harivamsa Parva*, the only major modification being that his numerous enemies are not demons (*asuras*), but animals or human beings endowed with magical powers. For the Jainas these stories had no great religious significance. What distinguishes the Jaina account from the Brahminic narrative is Krsna's relationship to his cousin Nemi, the





Tirthankara, on the one hand, and to his elder brother Balarama, the "Baladeva," on the other.

Jinasena's narrative of Krsna does not begin with his present life but looks back to several of his former lives and extends for at least two lives beyond his death as a "Vasudeva." It is customary for Jaina authors to begin the life story of a major character with a significant event in one of his or her past lives that may hold the seed that bears fruit in the events of the present life of that person. The story of Krsna thus begins in the seventh life prior to his current incarnation. 33 During that lifetime, the person now known as Krsna was employed as a cook in the household of a king and gained a great reputation for preparing the most delicious meat dishes; he earned the title of Amrta-rasayana, as well as the lordship of ten villages. When the king died and his son succeeded to the throne, the new king came under the influence of a Jaina monk and gave up eating meat altogether. The cook was thus left without a job and also lost the revenue of nine of his ten villages. Realizing that a Jaina monk, the preceptor of the new king, was the cause of his loss, he fed the monk a poisonous bitter gourd; as a result the monk died. Because of this evil act, this cook was reborn in hell; eventually he emerged from that abode and, after various travails in succeeding births as a human being and once as a heavenly being, he was born as Krsna, the ninth Vasudeva. The significance of Jinasena's narration of this story of Krsna's past life as a cook of meat dishes does not become clear until we examine his relationship to Jina Nemi, his cousin.

As noted above, Nemi was the youngest son of Samudra-vijaya, the eldest brother of Vasudeva, the father of Krsna and Balarama. Nemi must have been quite young, probably an adolescent, during Krsna's war with Jarasandha. He enters the Krsna narrative when the latter was already married to several of his wives, including Satyabhama, Rukmini, and Jambavati. To these ladies Nemi was a younger brother-in-law (*devara*). It is well known even to this day in Rajasthan and Gujarat that a platonic romantic relationship often takes place between younger brothers and their elder brothers' wives. All of the Jaina accounts are unanimous in depicting Nemi as a very handsome but shy young man, one having little inclination towards the amorous sports in which the wives of Krsna and Balarama constantly tried to engage him. On one day, the story

goes, they all enticed Nemi to sport with them in a pond; and when he left to dry himself he playfully asked Satyabhama, Krsna's chief queen, to wash his wet clothes, a request that only a husband should prop-





erly make. Satyabhama pretended to be offended by this slight and taunted Nemi by asking if by making such a request he meant to set himself equal to her husband, the Lord of the Pañcajanya conch. His pride hurt, Nemi walked away in anger and entered the armory of Krsna, in which the conch, Pañcajanya, was in safekeeping. It was believed that no one but Krsna could lift this "jewel" of a conch, let alone blow it. Nemi marched inside and amazed the guardians of the conch by lifting it up and blowing it; the reverberations of the sound of the conch reached all over the city and even caused elephants to break their chains in agitation.

When Krsna discovered that Nemi had ventured to blow the Pañcajanya, he realized that his younger cousin was a serious potential rival for his wives' affections as well as for his kingdom, and he resolved to test Nemi's strength. Therefore, in a friendly manner, he asked Nemi to engage in an arm-wrestling contest. Nemi simply extended his arm for Krsna to bend it down, but his arm stood like an iron crossbar and Krsna was unable to shake it by even a hair's breadth. Several Jaina manuscripts illustrating this scene in the life of Nemi show Krsna swinging like a monkey from Nemi's arm, unable to bend it. 34 Krsna took the defeat gracefully and embraced Nemi; suggesting that it was time for him to get settled as a married man, he arranged for Nemi's alliance with princess Rajimati.

However, the threat of Nemi's superior might haunted Krsna, and he was determined to remove this thorn in his side. He devised a plan for creating a situation that would result in Nemi's going to the forest as a monk. The fateful subconscious impression of his past life as a cook of meat dishes must have in some way led him to forge a plan to gather in the public park of Dvaraka a large herd of animals made ready for the butcher's knife, apparently for the wedding feast of Nemi and Rajimati.35 Thus, as the bridegroom's procession made the rounds of the city on the day of the wedding, heading towards the home of the bride, Nemi's chariot passed by this park, and he was moved by the pitiable sight of these miserable animals bleating and crying. When Nemi learned from his charioteer that the animals had been brought there for those of his guests who ate meat, his heart was overcome with remorse, and he immediately left the wedding procession and turned toward the forest, with the determination to become a monk. Neither the wailings of Rajimati nor the pleas of Krsna and Balarama were able to dissuade him from his purpose.

It is well known that even in the most ancient times the Jainas have beenas attested by the evidence of Buddhist texts36very scrupulous in the observance of a vegetarian diet for both laymen





and monks and have never been known to serve any meat dishes under any circumstances whatsoever. In the entire narrative literature of the Jainas, there is no parallel to this story of a Jaina household, especially one so distinguished as to have given birth to a Tirthankara, preparing to slaughter animals to feed their guests. One might not be off the mark in suggesting that the purpose of this Jaina story was to defame Krsna by making him capable of so heinous an act, calculated to sabotage his cousin's marriage and royal career. That the Jaina authors felt compelled even to allow such a story in their narrative of Krsna is a sure indication of the fact that they had very serious problems in assimilating into their fold this divinity of a heretic faith, who was notorious for his unethical conduct. As noted above, Krsna was to be reborn in hellit would be his second time in that dismal abode since we began to trace his past livesas a consequence, at least in Jaina minds, not so much of his acts of violence against his enemies in the great war as of his perpetration of this particular act of intended animal slaughter. Nevertheless, once Nemi had become a mendicant, Krsna seems to have been a fervent devotee of the Jina Nemi and engaged in such pious acts as the occasional fasting required of a devout Jaina layman.

The Jaina account of the succeeding events in the lives of Krsna and Balarama, culminating in the destruction of Dvaraka by the curse of the sage Dvaipayana, are related in much the same manner in the Jaina Puranas as they appear in the Brahminic texts, but they make a sudden departure from these texts when they come to describe the scene of the deaths of these two brothers. In the *Bhagavata Purana*, for example, the Yadavas killed each other under the influence of liquor, and even Balarama and Krsna got into a fistfight. When all of the remaining members of the Yadava clan perished in this manner, Balarama, it is said, approached a rock beside the sea, sat down upon it, and peacefully breathed his last. Krsna, we are told, lay resting all alone under a tree with one leg raised across his knee. A hunter named Jara (old age), thinking it was a deer, shot an arrow at Krsna and pierced his heel, wounding him mortally. As the hunter approached the body he realized his

terrible mistake, but Krsna reassured him and asked him to convey the news of the destruction of Dvaraka to the Pandavas. Then, by his yogic power Krsna ascended to his divine abode, leaving behind no mortal remains. 37

The Jaina account of this concluding event in the lives of these two brothers is markedly different, calculated to remove once and for all any doubt about their being anything but ordinary human





beings! According to Jinasena, the sage Dvaipayana was not a heretical ascetic but a Jaina monk given to extreme austerities, one who had amassed great yogic powers, which, if misused, were capable of burning anything at will. It is said that while drunk with liquor, some of the young Yadava princes, notably some of the sons of Balarama and Krsna, insulted the haughty sage and then assaulted him, thereby provoking his anger and the resulting destruction of Dvaraka by fire. Krsna and Balarama begged the sage to spare the lives of their children but were barely able to escape from the city themselves. The two brothers then wandered all alone, shorn of their royal insignia, barefoot in the sands of the desert of Kutch.

There Krsna, suffering from great thirst and unable to walk even one step further, begged Balarama to fetch water. While Balarama was away, Jarakumara, an older step-brother of Krsna who had left his parental home in his youth and had somehow survived in the desert by hunting, saw him from a distance; thinking him to be an animal, he shot an arrow at him and wounded him fatally. He realized his mistake as he approached Krsna, and, full of remorse, confessed to him that he had left his home precisely to avoid such an occurrence, which had been predicted for him by a soothsayer, and that the inevitable had at last happened. Krsna recognized him and asked him to go to tell the Pandavas about the destruction of Dvaraka and also of his death, and, seeing no sign of Balarama, gave his Kaustubha jewel as a token for him to reclaim the Yadava kingdom. As Jarakumara departed, Krsna covered himself completely with his upper garment and lay there thinking of all those among his relatives who had renounced the world, following the noble example of Nemi. He lamented the fact that he was not able to engage in any such holy act due to the heavy burden of his karmic deeds. Yet he reaffirmed his faith in the teachings of the Jina, chanted Pañcanamaskara-*mantra* (a holy Jaina litany) and greeted Lord Nemi as he breathed his last. He was reborn instantaneously in [the third] hell. 38

As in the case of Laksmana, Krsna's descent to hell as a result of his being a Vasudeva need not come as a surprise to those who know the Jaina laws of *karma*. Yet what is greatly astonishing is that simultaneously with his statement of Krsna's rebirth in hell, Jinasena declares that Krsna was destined to be a future Tirthankara.39 It should be remembered that, although it is required for a Vasudeva to be reborn in hell, it is certainly not a Jaina rule that a Vasudeva must become a Tirthankara. Jinasena must have had some scriptural authority for making such a claim for Krsna, but he does not reveal any specific actions of Krsna that





might have earned for him such a unique status, either before or during his life as a Vasudeva. Nor does Jinasena indicate how distant this future will be; but subsequent Jaina writers agree that Krsna will be the sixteenth Tirthankara in the next time cycle, 40 which gives him a fairly long period of time to spend in his present abode. There is also unanimous agreement that Krsna's birth as a human being will take place immediately as he emerges from hell and that it will be his last birth, the birth as a Tirthankara. If this were the case, then one must wonder when Krsna could have accumulated those sixteen meritorious acts that are considered prerequisites for birth as a Tirthankara.41 It seems that Krsna's destination to become so exalted a person as a Tirthankara was the result of an exceptional concession made by the Jaina *acaryas* in an effort to rehabilitate Krsna and make this assimilation irrevocable.

Returning to the scene of Krsna's death, we find that Balarama returned after a long time and did not realize that Krsna was dead but thought that he was asleep and let him rest. After several hours without seeing any sign of movement, Balarama suspected that Krsna might have died, but so deep was his attachment to Krsna that he refused to believe it. For six months, we are told, he carried Krsna around, bathing his body and taking care of it and crying over his silent brother. Eventually the Pandavas, accompanied by Jarakumara, arrived in the desert and found him in that miserable condition. Even they could not persuade Balarama to believe that Krsna indeed was dead. A god named Siddhartha, the soul of Krsna's former charioteer, saw Balarama in this state and by magical means created in front of him a scene in which someone was planting a lotus on a rock. When Balarama laughed at the foolishness of the god's act, the celestial being in turn pointed out the stupidity of Balarama in carrying a dead body around with the hope of reviving it! That finally opened his eyes, and the Pandavas brought the corpse of Krsna to Tungi, a hill top, where it was cremated.42 Both Balarama and the Pandavas handed over

their kingdoms to Jarakumara and renounced the world to become Jaina monks. Then, leading the holy life of yogis, they one by one died peacefully in meditation. Of the five Pandavas, Yudhisthira, Bhima, and Arjuna attained *moksa*43 at the end of their lives, while Nakula and Sahadeva were reborn in heaven.

Balarama could not overcome his attachment to Krsna and hence was not yet ready to attain *moksa*.44 He therefore was reborn in heaven and started immediately to seek his lamented brother. His grief knew no bounds when, with his extrasensory perception, he saw that Krsna was nowhere to be found in heaven but had been





consigned to hell. Using his supernatural powers, Balarama then descended into hell and approached Krsna and asked him to ascend to heaven with him. But as soon as Krsna made an effort to rise, his limbs began to drip as if they were made of butter. Krsna then realized the force of the inexorable laws of *karma*, and asked his brother to return to heaven. He then resolved to be reborn as a human being and to strive to attain *moksa*. 45

This Jaina account of the deaths of the two *salaka purusas* and their passing into the destinies of heaven and hell, respectively, are truly remarkable. The Jaina tradition that Krsna died before Balarama and that Balarama carried Krsna's dead body around for six months was probably intended to counter the Vaisnavite belief that Krsna, being an avatar, was transported to his divine abode in his physical body (*sadehamukti*). As for Balarama, who also was considered a minor avatar in the Brahminic stories, his lack of fortitude in the face of his brother's death belied any such claim of a divine portion in him. It should be remembered that Balarama's counterpart in the Jaina *Ramayana*, namely Rama, also survived his younger brother Laksmana and mourned over his death for a long time; and yet Rama, unlike Balarama, was deemed virtuous enough to attain *moksa* in that very life.

Balarama's visit to hell to raise Krsna follows the example of Sita, who, after having been born in heaven, visited Laksmana in hell to admonish him to abide by the Jaina faith. The Jainas probably saw in these visits merely an affection for a former brother and brother-in-law and hence considered them fitting conclusions to their stories. Jinasena's *Harivamsa Purana*, however, goes a step further and describes an extraordinary scene showing the weakness of the brothers Krsna and Balarama, a weakness that appears inappropriate in a soul who was, as noted earlier, destined to become a Tirthankara upon his immediate rebirth as a human being. Incredible as it may seem, Jinasena's account tells us that when the god Balarama took leave of Krsna in hell, the latter implored him to popularize the cult of Visnu by uttering the following words:

> O Brother, return to heaven, and enjoy the fruits of your meritorious deeds. I, too, at the end of my life here, shall attain human birth for the sake of *moksa*. We shall together then perform austerities by taking refuge in the teachings of the Jina and will together destroy the bonds of *karma* and attain the bliss of *moksa*. But in the meantime, please, for the sake of increasing my glory, fill the whole land of Bharata with temples containing images of me bearing the conch and the wheel





> and the mace in my hands. Fill the minds of the people of Bharatavarsa with astonishment by displaying [scenes depicting] the two of us, accompanied by our sons, and so forth [that is, spouses], and endowed with great riches. 46

Jinasena's account concludes with the following words:

> Hearing these words of Krsna, Balarama, that King of Gods, came to the land of the Bharatas and, constrained by love for his brother, did as he was enjoined by Visnu. He created representations of Krsna and Balarama holding the wheel and the ploughshare, respectively, standing in celestial mansions [*vimana*s, that is, *ratha*s?],and had their images enshrined in a great many temples dedicated to Lord Vasudeva which were located in large cities. He thus made the entire world fall under the spell of Visnu and returned to his abode in heaven.47

Having narrated this extraordinary story, which probably had no other purpose than to explain to the Jainas how a pair of Jaina heroes, one of whom was a would-be Tirthankara at that, came to be worshipped as the deities of the heretics, Jinasena closes his narration by drily observing: "Alas! What will not be done by those who are given to such [foolish] affection!"48

Vimalasuri's *Paümacariya* took us up to the twentieth Tirthankara and Punnata Jinasena's *Harivamsa Purana* brought us to the narrative of the twenty-second Tirthankara Nemi. In both texts the emphasis was more on the Baladeva-Vasudeva pairs

of heroes than on the Tirthankaras themselves. It is for this reason that these two narrative works, although commonly considered to be Puranas, do not qualify as Mahapuranas, the characteristic Jaina designation for the comprehensive biographies of all the sixty-three *salaka purusas*. This honor truly belongs to the ninth-century narrative work *Trisasti-laksana-sri-mahapurana-sangraha*, or, in brief, *Mahapurana*. This monumental work of some twenty thousand *slokas*, written in two parts (*Adi Purana*49 and *Uttara Purana*,50 respectively), was initiated by the Digambara mendicant Jinasena, who is said to have been a teacher of the Rastrakuta King Amoghavarsa I, who ruled from Manyakheta in the ninth century (814-77 C.E.). This Jinasena was probably unaware of the *Harivamsa Purana* written by his predecessor of the same name, who is, hence, differentiated by his ecclesiastical lineage name, Punnata. It is stated in the text that (the second) Jinasena died after having completed the first section, *Adi Purana*, comprising forty-six chapters and dedicated entirely to





the story of the first Tirthankara Rsabha, and the first two chapters of the second section. The remainder of the work, extending to the seventy-sixth chapter and containing the biographies of all the remaining Tirthankaras and the other Illustrious beings, was completed by Jinasena's immediate disciple, Gunabhadra.

Hitherto Jaina authors appeared to have been preoccupied with the narratives of "historical" figures, the Epic heroes of the *itihasa* literature. Jinasena was to arrest this trend and to concentrate attention not only on the Tirthankaras, the true heroes of the Jainas, but especially on the life stories of the first Tirthankara Rsabha and his son, Bharata, the first Cakravartin. Although adopted at some stage by the Brahminic Puranas as their own minor characters, as will be seen below, both Rsabha and Bharata were truly Jaina characters, and their assimilation required no special effort. Since their advent in the Jaina mythology took place at the very beginning of the present cycle of time, they could be hailed by the Jainas as the founding fathers of our civilization, lawgivers for secular welfare as well as for the spiritual path of salvation.

In his introductory chapter of the *Adi Purana*, Jinasena rightly claims that his work is a *Mahapurana* because it deals with all the sixty-three *salaka purusas*, but it can also be considered an *itihasa*, as well as a *dharmasastra*. Although he makes specific references to creation and the other *pañcalaksanas*, he chooses a novel characterization for his Purana, consisting of such items as space (*ksetra*, that is, Jaina cosmology), time (*kala*, that is, the infinite cycles of time divided into ascending and descending halves), the fourfold organization of a community as monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen (*tirtha*), the Great Beings (*sat-purusas*, that is, the s*alaka purusas*), and finally their conduct (*carita*). 51

The narrative of the first Tirthankara Rsabha thus begins with a description of the present half of the Jaina time cycle, the *avasarpini* (Descending). It is said that this period began billions of years ago when human beings lived in the paradise that was earth and were sustained by wish-fulfilling trees (*kalpavrksas*) and had no form of government whatsoever. As time passed, the magic trees disappeared, the population increased, and there arose a need to organize a society with leaders able to teach farming and other means of producing food, preserving it for storage and distribution, and protecting it from the depredations of greedy people. Thus began the first social structure, the heads of which were called "Kulakaras" or "Manus." The first of these was Pratisruti, in whose line was born Nabhi, the fourteenth Kulakara. Rsabha, the first Tirthankara and the fifteenth Kulakara, was born to Nabhi's wife,





Marudevi. Jinasena devotes a great many verses to the conception and birth of this first *salaka purusa*, the founder of Jainism in our epoch.

According to Jinasena's narrative, gods appeared on earth to celebrate these two auspicious events in the career of the new Tirthankara, calling him the "first lord," the "Adideva." At this time all men were equal, and as yet society was not divided into the four classes (*varnas*). Indeed, it may be said that such a division came into existence quite inadvertently, when Rsabha, as he grew to be a young man, bore arms and assumed the role of a king and gave the title of Ksatriya to those who were assigned the duty of protecting the people and enforcing the law. Eventually, as he discovered different means of livelihood, such as the sword (*asi*, that is, government), ink (*masi*, that is, reading and writing), agriculture (*krsi*), the arts (*vidya*), crafts (*silpa*), and commerce (*vanijya*), there came into existence groups of people engaging in one or another of these occupations, who came to be called "Ksatriyas," "Vaisyas," and "Sudras." The Brahmin class had not yet come into being, and the path of renunciation also was as yet unknown.

Kulakara Rsabha led a fruitful life as a householder and fathered one hundred sons and two daughters. The eldest of his

sons, Bharata, became the first of the twelve Cakravartins of the Jaina Puranic tradition. Eventually, Rsabha renounced the world to become a Jaina mendicant; divested of all his possessions including his clothing, he wandered about "sky-clad," a fact agreed upon both by Digambara and Svetambara traditions alike. Thus he had the distinction of being the first renouncer of our epoch. It is said that a great many of his friends, sons, and even grandsons, at first joined him in assuming the holy vows of homelessness and celibacy but soon left him due to their inability to withstand the rigors of his discipline. Ashamed to return to their homes, these proud men became wanderers, calling themselves *parivrajakas*, the founders of what the Jainas consider to be heretical schools of mendicants, such as the Ajivakas, Ekadandins, Tridandins, Vaikhanasas, and so forth. 52

Rsabha, however, remained firm in his austerities and became the omniscient Jina, the first initiator of a new Tirtha, an institution that had been extinct for countless years. A great many of his former subjects, including many of his sons and two daughters, called "Brahmi" and "Sundari," became members of the order of monks and nuns. The Jina Rsabha then laid down rules for the guidance of lay people also, whereby they could progressively refrain from worldly activities and gradually reach the stage of mendicancy.



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Thus there came into being an ideal society predominantly consisting of these four sections, collectively called the "Tirtha," with groups of apostates subsisting on its fringes and professing their heresies.

One would expect that the Lord of this Tirtha would be described merely as a saint rapt in meditation and living for the most part in seclusion in a forest. But such is not the case; the Adi, that is, the First Tirthankara, after whom Jinasena's Purana is named, is portrayed as possessing such majesty and grandeur that it would surpass any description of the great Trinity of Puranic mythology: Brahma, Visnu, and Siva. Jina Rsabha is a sky-clad (*digambara*) mendicant, and yet in Jinasena's account we find him seated in the midst of a palatial assembly especially prepared for his sermons by Indra the king of gods and flanked by gods who hold raised parasols and proclaim his lordship over the three worlds. He has a human body, and yet it is so pure that its luster can outshine the divine bodies of the heavenly beings assembled there. By an extraordinary miraculous power he can be seen facing all four directions at once, a feature claimed by the Brahminic Puranas for Brahma, the creator.

The Jainization of Rama and Krsna having been completed by his predecessors, Jinasena seems to have set his sights on claiming the functions of the Puranic holy trinity for the founder of Jainism. He employs the most characteristic adjectives traditionally reserved for Brahma to describe his chosen Deity, Lord Rsabha. 53 Thus Rsabha is called "womb of gold" (*hiranyagarbha*), as there was a shower of gold when he was born! He is hailed as "lord of creatures" (Prajapati) and "ordainer" (*vidhatr*), for he was the first king and the first to invent fire and other means of livelihood. He is called "self-existent" (*svayambhu*) because he was self-taught and hence had a spiritual rebirth independent of a teacher. Being the first to realize perfection in our epoch he is called "primordial man" (*purana-purusa*), and because of his omniscience he can be described by the [*Purusa-sukta*] term "all-seeing" (*visvatascaksuh*)! In short, he is to be called the "first lord," the "Adideva," the "very Brahma himself."

Rsabha may be called "Visnu" as well, since his knowledge is all pervasive. And he is truly "unfallen" (*acyuta*), as he has reached the most sublime state, which is unshakable and eternal. Being the most auspicious, he deserves to be called "Siva," and he is "the end of being" (*bhavantaka*), for he has freed himself from the bonds of *samsara*. And above all he is lord of yogis (*yogisvara*), for he has reached *kaivalya* solely by the path of meditation (that is, without the aid of an external agency). Such investment of Rsabha with the divinity of the Puranic trinity without, of course, making him the



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creator, sustainer or destroyer, allows Jinasena to deify his human Jina and to claim for him both the antiquity and the spiritual authority that will be required to challenge the validity of the Vedic and Puranic teachings on creation and dissolution, the false claim of divinity for their gods and avatars, and, above all, their doctrine of the divine origin of the caste system and the alleged supremacy of the Brahmin within it.

The examination of the Brahminic doctrines of creation and secondary creation provides Jinasena with an excellent opportunity to engage in a debate on the validity of a theistic creation, and to propound the Jaina doctrines of the plurality of souls and their transmigration and possible release from the regions of Jaina cosmology, all without the benefit of a superior

beingthe Creator God. As for the epochs of the Manus, Rsabha himself was a Manu and himself laid down the duties of the various sections of society; these can never be found in the false scriptures that enjoin animal sacrifices in the name of *dharma* but only in the Jaina scriptures. The same holds true for the knowledge of royal dynasties (*vamsas*), for the best of these lineages, such as the Iksvaku, Kuru, and Hari lineages, also originated from Rsabha and his son Bharata, the first Cakravartin. Having thus contested the right of the Brahminic Puranas to instruct on the proposed goals of a scripture, Jinasena expounds the Jaina teachings pertaining to all those areas considered to be essential for the true realization of the four goals of human life (*purusarthas*).

The differences between the Brahminic and Jaina cosmologies as expounded by Jinasena need not detain us here, but the Jaina challenge to the alleged superiority of the Brahmin class, a major theme of the *Adi Purana*, surely merits discussion. As has been pointed out earlier, there were no caste distinctions at the beginning of our epoch, since all mankind was a single caste (*manusyajatir ekaiva*), according to Jinasena. 54 Divisions arose, however, not because of any premeditated design, but as a result of the discovery of new means of livelihood. It is also significant that Rsabha was portrayed as a householder, and not as the holy Jina, at the time when the Ksatriya, Vaisya, and the Sudra classes evolved; this would deny any sacredness to their origins through a holy injunction, as in the case of the Vedic *Purusa-sukta* in the Brahminic tradition. What is, however, far more significant is the fact that in the Jaina narrative the class of the Brahmins was promulgated, not by the omniscient Jina, but by his householder son Bharata; this deprives that class of any sanctity whatsoever.

There are two Jaina narratives that explain the origin of the



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Brahmin class, one appearing in the commentarial and Puranic literature of the Svetambaras and the other in the *Adi Purana* of Jinasena. A fanciful derivation of the Sanskrit word *brahmana* from the Prakrit form *mahana* provides the context for the Svetambara story. It is said that Bharata, after his conquest of the world, returned with a large amount of booty and wanted to share it with his ninety-nine brothers, who had become Jaina monks in the monastic order established by Jina Rsabha. He approached them with a cartload of food and other gifts, but this was rejected on the grounds that Jaina monks may not accept food specially prepared for them (*uddista*). Indra, the king of gods, then suggested to Bharata that the food might be offered to those lay people who had assumed the minor vows (*anuvratas*) prescribed by Rsabha for householders and had thus been initiated as lay people (*upasakas*). Bharata offered them food and other gifts and invited them to have their meals at his palace forever. Not only were they to be permanent guests of his household but also to forsake all means of livelihood that involved violence (*himsa*) and devote their lives to the study and teaching of the scriptures and the worship of the Jina. Their most important task, however, was to keep a vigil over the Cakravartin's conduct by admonishing him, "Do not kill, do not kill" (*ma hana*, *ma hana*): thus they came to be called *mahana*s, that is, Brahmins! Fanciful as this derivation of the word *brahmana* through its Prakrit form might be, it was endorsed by the great Jaina grammarian Hemacandra. 55 It is the Jaina way of explaining not only the origin of the Brahmin class but also the beginning of the pan-Indian rite of feeding Brahmins, a practice not unknown even to the orthodox Jainas of our day; it is claimed that the Jainas started this good practice in order to promote *ahimsa*, but, alas, it has now degenerated into an adjunct to the common household rituals!

Jinasena ignores both the Prakrit *mahana* and the Sanskrit *brahmana* and concentrates on the word *dvija* (twice-born) for his explanation of the origin of the Brahmin class under the patronage of Bharata. According to his narrative, a large number of laymen, headed by Bharata himself, had been initiated into the vows (*anuvratas*), which had been enunciated by Jina Rsabha for householders. Bharata wished to reward the true initiates and devised a way of testing their adherence to the vows. He had the courtyard of his residence strewn with fresh flowers and sprouting grain and invited the citizens to a feast on a sacred day. Those who were careless crossed the courtyard without regard for the vegetable life, but those who were virtous did not enter lest they trample on it and thus break their vows against harming living beings. Bharata then



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invited those virtuous people to enter by a suitable path, and he honored them. He also encouraged them to assume further restraints on their conduct so as to make progress on one or more of the eleven stages of spiritual progress (*sravaka-pratima*) 56 as laid down by the Jina Rsabha, which would prepare them for mendicant life. Those who accepted this new status (*varna-labha*) he designated as the "Twice-born" (*dvija*s) in the discipline of the Jina. He confirmed their advancement by investing them with sacred threads (*yajñopavita*), the number of which indicated the number of stages (*pratimas*) they had assumed. Thus began the ritual known as initiation (*upanayana*) and the practice of wearing sacred

threads, as well as the formation of a special class of people (*dvijas*), the first "divine Brahmins" (*deva-brahmanas*) of our epoch.57

A long time was to elapse before Bharata began to have doubts about the wisdom of his instituting a class of "Twice-born" without first obtaining the permission of Lord Rsabha. He therefore approached Rsabha and described the manner in which he had established the "Twice-born" and begged the Lord to declare to him both the consequence of his presumptuous act as well as the virtues and vices of this class.

Jinasena's strictures concerning this class, as will be seen presently, match in spirit and letter the invective and prophecies that appear in the Brahminic Puranas against the followers of Rsabha. This portion of the *Adi Purana* therefore deserves to be reproduced fully here:

> O son, that which has been done is good indeed, and moreover, the worship of pious Brahmins is good, too. However, there will be some harmful consequences about which you must be informed. You have created the Brahmin class, who will be righteous teachers as long as the Krta Age endures, but when the Kali Age draws near there will be backsliding teachers who, out of pride in their high birth, will embrace the very opposite of the right path. These people, full of the arrogance of their rank, will claim to be most excellent among men, and soon, greedy for wealth, they will delude the world with their false scriptures. The favored treatment that they will enjoy will increase their presumptuousness and make them puffed up with a false pride, so that they will lead men astray as they themselves fashion false religious treatises.
>
> They will be so short sighted that they will promote changes for the worse at the end of the Age, and, their minds clouded by evil, they will become the enemies of religion. As they delight





> in injury to life and relish eating honey and meat, these wicked people will, alas, promote the *dharma* of action and, full of evil hopes, corrupt the *dharma* of nonviolence in favor of the *dharma* of injunctions (*codana*).As the Age progresses, rogues will blasphemously wear the sacred thread and engage eagerly in the killing of life, thereby obstructing the right path.
>
> Therefore, although the creation of the Brahmin class is not of itself harmful today, it does contain the seed of harm as yet buried in the future, because impious heretics will come forth. Nevertheless, although this seed of harm is truly there for the end of the Age, there is no cause for removing it at present, for you have not transgressed against the nature of *dharma*. 58

Jinasena was apparently not content with his suggestion that the present-day Brahmins were descendants of apostates from the original groups of devout Jaina laymen, the first to be designated as "Twice-born" by Cakravarti Bharata. His prophecy that in degenerate times these so-called Brahmins would compose their own scriptures disregarding the doctrine of *ahimsa* had come true; the Jaina authors had studied them with great care and had noted several portions that openly enjoined animal sacrifices. Still, these texts by themselves did not explain how the Brahmins came to adopt as their means of livelihood the performances of sacrifices and other rituals. In his zeal to establish a community of Jainas parallel to that of Brahminic society, Jinasena put forth a new lawbook (*dharmasastra*), a Jaina lawbook, as it were, to serve both as a manual of ritual, complete with litany, and as a code of civil law as well. In this manner the third distinguishing mark of the Jaina Puranas, namely, reigns (*tirtha*), corresponding to the epochs of the Manus of the Brahminic Puranas, would be fulfilled for the first time by a Jaina Purana.

The ritual of initiation, for example, as described above, was carried out by Bharata himself and needed neither a priest nor the sacred fire. Indeed, the notion that fire is sacred is alien to Jaina doctrine, since for them the four basic elements, earth, water, air, and fire, belong to the species of life that has only the tactile sense and therefore ranks lowest in the classification of sentient beings. For the Brahminic tradition, fire was sacred because it was the embodiment of both Agni the fire god and Agni the domestic priest (*purohita*) of the gods. Jinasena therefore shows great courage of conviction when he declares that fire by itself has no inherent sacredness or divinity (*na svato 'gneh pavitratvam devatarupam eva va*). Anticipating a question about the propriety of Jaina laymen

lighting fires on such occasions as marriages and other rites of passage, Jinasena replies that fire can nevertheless be considered pure, on account of its contact with the body of the Tirthankara Rsabha at the time of his cremation. Lest this association between the holy Jina and fire be taken as granting absolute sacredness to fire, Jinasena hastens to add that fire is to be considered suitable for worship only on a conventional level (*vyavaharanaya*); it is comparable to the worship of holy places and pilgrimage sites that become worthy of worship only because a Jina has attained enlightenment (*nirvana*) in those places. 59

Jinasena's explanation of the sacredness of fire seems to have gained acceptance by the learned sections of both the Digambara and the Svetambara sects, as can be witnessed from similar explanations found in the works of the twelfth-century author Hemacandra. In his monumental work, the *Trisastisalakapurusacaritra*, the *Mahapurana* of the Svetambara tradition, Hemacandra goes even further and suggests that the ritual of the fire (*agnihotra*), the hallmark of the Brahmin class, is to be traced to the cremation ceremony of the Jina Rsabha. The three different fires that came to be held sacred by the Vedic Brahmins had truly originated from those fires in which the bodies of the Jina Rsabha, the sages born of the noble Iksvaku lineage, and those of the remaining saints (Arhats), had been respectively cremated.60

What was originally an act of piety, namely, keeping the holy flame alive, turned gradually into a means of livelihood in the hands of the Brahmins of degenerate times. They employed it even in the worship of demigods and goddesses who were given not only to false views, but also to the most unholy practice of receiving offerings of flesh and blood. It is clear from reading the *Adi Purana* that during the time of Jinasena a large number of the Jaina laity had come to accept the worship of these heretic gods and goddesses as a legitimate part of their worship of the Jinas and had probably installed their images in their own temples as well. Jinasena was waging an open war against the worship of these non-Jaina divinities and had to combat their influence by installing a new set of Jaina "guardian deities" somehow associated with the lives of the Tirthankaras and thus worthy of occupying a place of honor near the pedestal of the Jina and sharing in the devotions offered by the laity. Through his Purana, which he characterized as a *dharmasastra*, Jinasena demanded that a true Jaina should remove the images of the heretic gods (*mithya-devata*) from his residence, and added: "He should in a public manner (*prakasam*) take them away somewhere else and abandon them, saying: 'Until now, out of ignorance we have wor-



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shipped you with respect. However, now the time has come for us to worship our own guardian deities (*sasana-devata*). Pray do not be angry; you may go wherever you please.'" 61

Jinasena's *Adi Purana* thus discharged the function of a lawbook, containing recommendations and prohibitions addressed to the followers of a Jina. Prior to his time, the Jaina books of discipline concerned themselves with the conduct of monks and nuns alone. There were guide books (*Sravakacaras*) to instruct the laity in keeping the vows prescribed and to set forth the procedures for their observation. But the Jainas lacked the type of lawbook comparable to the *Manusmrti*, for example, in the Brahminic tradition. Jinasena's *Adi Purana* fills this need and carries with it the kind of authority one associates with the *dharmasastra* literature pertaining to the duties of the castes, rites of passage, and so forth. In writing the *Adi Purana*, Jinasena thus introduced a new function for the Jaina Puranas, namely, educating the Jaina community to preserve its identity as a community separate from that of the Brahmins, a task that they perceived was necessary in the face of the Brahminic attempts to absorb them.

Jinasena did not live to complete his work; the lives of the remaining sixty-one s*alaka purusas* were therefore compressed into a single volume, the *Uttara Purana*, by his disciple Gunabhadra. The reader is immediately aware of his stereotyped descriptions of the warfare conducted by the Cakravartins and other heroes. Once again Gunabhadra returns to the narratives of Rama and Laksmana or of Krsna and Balarama. These show further modifications of the versions of Vimala or of Punnata Jinasena, modifications that strive even further to remove certain aspects of these stories that the medieval Jainas found offensive to their moral sensibilities. In Gunabhadra's narrative of the *Ramayana*, for example, Rama is not asked to abdicate in favor of Bharata, as he is in Vimalasuri's *Paümacariya*, but instead leaves Ayodhya of his own volition, together with Sita and Laksmana, and sets out to found a kingdom of his own. Similar changes in the stories of the Krsna legend also appear in other Puranas by subsequent authors, most notably in the writings of the Svetambara *acaryas*, especially in Hemacandra's work referred to above. The works hitherto examined in some detail all happen to be the works of Digambara writers, for whom the Puranas were the only surviving scriptures. The Svetambaras, however, had such canonical narratives as the *Nayadhammakahao*62 or the *Uvasagadasao*,63 which relate the stories of some of the *salaka purusas*, including Krsna. Their narratives, therefore, often differ from those found in the Digambara tradition.

A fine example of this is provided by the story of Draupadi as

narrated in the literature of these two sects. No Jaina writer has been comfortable with the *Mahabharata* account of Draupadi's polyandrous marriage to all five Pandava brothers. Digambara writers have tended to treat this as a slander of the Brahmins against the character of Draupadi and the Pandavas, and have devised means of explaining the event away as a gross misrepresentation of an accidental falling of the garland, thrown by Draupadi to Arjuna, on the heads of all five brothers at the time of her self-choice (*svayamvara*) marriage. 64 The author of the *Harivamsa Purana*, who explains this event in the above manner, takes the heretical Brahmins to task for suggesting that she had actually married all five brothers and wonders why their tongues do not split into a hundred pieces for uttering such slanderous words against so pure a woman and against the brothers of Arjuna, who treated her as their sister!65

Hemacandra, on the other hand, in his *Trisasti*, allows the polyandrous marriage to stand as something that had indeed happened, but he explains it by recourse to a story of Draupadi's past as given in the Svetambara scripture *Nayadhammakahao* and its ancient commentaries. According to this story, Draupadi in one of her former lives was a beautiful woman called Nagasri, who out of disgust towards a Jaina monk had fed him poisonous food that caused great burning in his body. As a result she suffered for long periods in hell and in animal existences and eventually was reborn as a beautiful womanbut one with a peculiar defect: anyone who touched her carnally would experience the great pain of being burned by fire. Although she attracted a large number of suitors, no one dared to approach her; when finally she was married to a man of her liking he screamed in anguish at her first touch and ran away from the bridal chamber. Nagasri was then abandoned by her husband's household as well as by her own parents and wandered alone from place to place for several years. Eventually she became a Jaina nun and threw herself wholeheartedly into severe austerities hoping thereby to get rid of her ailment. One day, it is said, she saw five handsome young men pursuing a beautiful courtesan, and Nagasri, having been deprived of her conjugal happiness, felt a forceful longing (*nidana*) that as a result of her severe penances she might enjoy similar pleasure in her next life. She died instantly at that moment and in the course of time was reborn as Draupadi. Her polyandrous marriage to the Pandavas was therefore predestined by her *nidana*,66 a theme all too familiar to us from the stories of Krsna, Ekanasa, and others; it had to be endured and could be overcome only by an act of renunciation demanding an equal force of will by her and all of her husbands, which did eventually occur.

The brief survey of the major trends in the Jaina Puranic liter-





ature given above supports our contention that the Jaina writers, in addition to their primary purpose of expounding Jaina doctrine, used this medium to combat Brahminic influences emanating from their Epics and Puranas. One must ask here whether the Jainas in fact had any reason to believe that they were under attack from their perceived adversaries, and also whether indeed the authors of the Brahminic Puranas were even aware of these Jaina appropriations of their heroes, the two avatars of Visnu, as well as their attempt to Jainize, as it were, the god Brahma-Prajapati through the character of Jina Rsabha.

An answer to these questions cannot be truly given without first establishing the chronological order in which the Brahminic Puranas were committed to writing. No Jaina Purana has ever been mentioned in any of the traditional eighteen Mahapuranas or the Upapuranas, and, with the exception of Rsabha and his son Bharata, no other character of the Jaina Puranas has figured in their narratives. The Jainas, on the other hand, show a remarkable familiarity with the Brahminic Puranas, although only one late Jaina Purana, namely, the seventeenth-century *Pandava Purana*, explicitly mentions the *Siva Purana* in criticizing the latter's alleged misrepresentation of the Pandava story. 67 But such a lack of cross-references does not tell us the whole story of the mutual impact between these two literary traditions, which were probably competing for the patronage of a common audience, namely, the mostly urban and affluent sections of the Indian community.

Nothing for example is known about the process by which Gautama, the Buddha, came to be assimilated into the Vaisnava tradition to make him worthy of being declared a full avatar of Visnu. One would expect the Brahminic authors to devote at least an episode or an entire chapter, if not an independent Purana, to explain this momentous event in the history of the Vaisnava religion. Yet all that one finds are a few lines here and there, often copies of what are probably the original verses of the *Visnu Purana*, which tell us nothing more than that Lord Visnu employed his power called "Yogamaya" and was thereby born as Buddha, the son of Suddhodana in the land of Kikatas (district of Gaya), to delude the demons, lead them astray into non-Vedic creeds, and thus bring about their destruction.68 The Buddhist records are even more silent on this fateful co-option of their supreme teacher by a heretical cult. We do not know if the Buddhists were even aware that he was

hailed as an avatar of a god, a truly blasphemous act against one whose atheistic doctrines were no secret to anyone. Indeed, it has been suggested that the Buddhists lost ground in the land of their birth





precisely because they remained oblivious to the dangers inherent in such assimilation: first, that of the Buddha being represented as an avatar of Visnu, and second, that of their heavenly Bodhisattvas (such as Mañjusri and Avalokitesvara) being regarded as emanations of Siva. 69

Only two short Jakata tales about Rama and Krsna70 are known to have been written in the Buddhist tradition, in marked contrast to the Jaina's voluminous Puranic and other narratives devoted entirely to these Epic characters, which survive to this day. It is very much to the credit of the Jainas, therefore, that they were vigilant about what was being said in the "heretic" Puranas and took vigorous steps not only to correct the "errors" perpetrated by their adversaries but even to confound them by producing revised versions of the events that claimed to be the authentic ones! We will never know the reasons why the Brahminic authors chose to favor the Buddha over his contemporary Jaina teacher Mahavira for the role of the avatar of Visnu, especially when it is realized that there are far more numerous, albeit oblique, references in their Puranas to Jaina heroes and their religion than to Buddhism and its heroes. Two examples of such references can be noted here, an earlier one from the *Bhagavata Purana* and a later one from the *Siva Purana*.

The *Bhagavata Purana* betrays its knowledge of Jainism by its use of the word *Arhat*, a characteristic epithet of the Jina, in conection with its narrative pertaining to one of Visnu's twenty-two minor (*amsa*) avatars, namely, Rsabha, who appears there in the company of such Brahminic sages as Kapila, Narada, and Veda-Vyasa. According to the author of the *Bhagavata Purana*, the purpose of the Rsabha-avatar was to establish the *sramana dharma* of the naked ascetics (*vatarasandnam sramananam rsinam*).71 As in the Jaina tradition, the Rsabha of the *Bhagavata Purana* was also born to Marudevi and Nabhi, one of the Manus; his story in the *Bhagavata Purana* is different in that Nabhi is said to have performed a great Vedic sacrifice that so pleased Visnu that he himself consented to be born as his son Rsabha. This Rsabha too begot a hundred sons, the eldest of whom was Bharata, the first Cakravartin, after whom the land of Rsabha was named Bharatavarsa. Unlike his counterpart in the Jaina accounts, this Rsabha himself as well as his sons became great devotees of the Brahmins and propitiated Visnu with many sacrifices. In fulfillment of his function as an avatar, this Rsabha then renounced the world to become a naked ascetic, a celibate *avadhuta*; after spending a great many years in severe austerities, he died in a forest fire while fasting to death and became one with Vasudeva.





Although the Jainas would strongly repudiate many of the details that appear in the *Bhagavata Purana* account of Rsabha, most importantly the claims that he was associated with Vedic sacrifices and devoted to the Brahmins and to Visnu, as well as the account of the manner of his death, there could be no objection to his being described as someone who taught the yogis the ascetic path of nudity. What is most offensive to them, however, is the great hostility to their religion shown openly in the following invective, which is presented as a prophecy by the *Bhagavata Purana* in its conclusion of the story of the Rsabha-avatar:

> When Arhat, the king of Konka, Venka, and Kutaka, comes to hear of this conduct of the divine Rsabhadeva, he too will give himself over to it. Indeed, since irreligion will thrive in the Kali Age, the king, confounded by inevitable fate, will abandon the security of his own religion and in consequence of his deluded understanding will promote the heretical and evil ways of the heretics (*pakhandas*).
>
> It is for this reason that villainous people, confounded by the illusion-provoking powers of God (*devamayamohitah*),will forsake the duties of purity and good conduct that are enjoined upon them and take up at will wicked vows that mock the gods, such as not bathing, not rinsing their mouths, not maintaining purity, and pulling out their hair. With their understanding thus corrupted by the irreligious Kali Age, they will forever deride *brahman*, the Brahmins, the Lord of the sacrifice, and other people. Then, trusting in the maintenance of their own world by upstart non-Vedic rites, like a blind man leading the blind, they will themselves fall into the blind darkness of hell. 72

I have examined elsewhere73 the many allusions to the practices of Jaina monks and the historical significance of the references made to "King Arhat" in the above quotation: it must be taken as referring to a king of the Deccan newly

converted to the Jaina faith, and could well refer to Amoghavarsa I (814-77 C.E.), the Rastrakuta king who was claimed as a patron of the Jaina a*carya* Jinasena, the author of the *Adi Purana*. The old idea found in the *Visnu Purana* that Visnu became incarnate as the Buddha through the power of his Yogamaya in order to delude the demons is now applied instead to the Jaina Tirthankara Rsabha and to the contemporary royal houses whose members had once been staunch followers of the Vedic religion but had since embraced the heretical religion.





The account in the *Siva Purana* also contains the word *Arhat*, although no Jaina character such as Rsabha is mentioned there by name. According to this account, Lord Siva instigated Lord Visnu to create a man, "illusion personified" (*mayamayam purusam*), with the sole purpose of teaching *dharma* to the demons, who by adhering to his false teaching would be consigned to the lower worlds (Patala). Visnu then created such a man, Arhat, who became a mendicant and produced false scriptures in Apabhramsa that were opposed to the teachings of the *sruti* and *smrti* and contrary to the *dharma* of class and stage of life. He was able to initiate the demon Tripura and others into the mendicant order of the Jainas, and brought about their destruction as desired by the gods Visnu and Siva. While this story agrees substantially with the *Visnu Purana* account of the Buddha avatar of Visnu, the author of the *Siva Purana* goes a step further and brings the narrative of this Arhat up to date by placing him in the Rajasthan desert, a stronghold of the Jaina community. In the Kali Age, he says, this Arhat (the *mayamaya purusa*) will settle in Marusthali and initiate into the Jaina mendicancy a large number of men who will go about wearing rags, holding pieces of cloth in front of their mouths, and constantly uttering the words, "*Dharma, dharma!*" The description is certainly meant to be a mockery of the Jaina monks of Rajasthan called "Sthanakavasis," an offshoot of the Svetambara sect, who are recognized even to this day by their *muhpatti* (a piece of white cloth held like a surgical mask over the mouth). 74

The specific reference to place names like Konka, Venka, and Kutaka in the *Bhagavata Purana*, and to Marusthali in the *Siva Purana*, in connection with the depiction of the "heresy" called "Jainism" proves abundantly that the Brahminic authors of the Puranas were well acquainted with the Digambara and the Svetambara mendicant communities of Karnataka/Maharashtra and Gujarat/ Rajasthan, respectively, where they flourished during medieval times.

The passages from the *Bhagavata Purana* and the *Siva Purana* quoted above, which openly use invective against Jaina holy men and their teachings, were probably a response of the Brahminic tradition to the persistent and sustained attack on their gods and teachings made in the Jaina Puranas. Yet the converse is also not impossible: should it be proved that these Brahminic imprecations predate the works of Vimalasuri or even of the two Jinsenas, which seems unlikely, it is conceivable that the Jainas decided to play the same game as the Brahmins and went them one better by undertaking a wholesale appropriation not only of the most popular avatars





of the god Visnu, but even of the god Brahma-Prajapati, the creator god of the Brahminic Puranas. Whereas we have enough evidence to show that the Jainas had indeed studied the Brahminic Puranas, there is very little indication that their works were studied by the authors of the Brahminic Puranas, for had the Brahmins indeed seen what the author of the *Harivamsa Purana* or the *Pandva Purana* had said about them, they would certainly have made some angry rejoinders. Unfortunately, no record of such literary retaliation has become available to us. In view of the kind of religious and sectarian segregation that exists between various communities of India, it is more than likely that non-Jainas ceased to have any contact with the Jaina material; and hence Jaina works enjoyed a very limited readership, probably confined only to a few Jaina monks and still fewer members of the learned laity.

Fortunately for us, a single piece of literary evidence from the time of Hemacandra, the twelfth-century a*carya*, has survived, and it sheds unprecedented light on the way in which those of the Brahminic tradition did indeed react when confronted publicly with Jaina stories about their Puranic heroes. It is well known that Hemecandra, the renowned author of the *Trisasti*, had been the celebrated teacher of Kumarapala, the Saivite king who had converted to the Jaina faith. Hemacandra was on many occasions hailed as a court pandit, an upholder of the Jaina faith in what was once a fortress of Saivism and Vaisnavism. Prabhacandra, the author of the *Prabhavakacarita*, who made a compilation of the biographies of several Svetambara *acaryas*, has given the following account of one of Hemacandra's sermons on the life of the Pandavas, and how it led to a great scuffle between the Brahmins and the Jainas that was finally resolved by the royal preceptor Hemacandra himself: 75

One day during the rainy season, when Acarya Hemacandra was in residence at a Jaina temple called "Caturmukha," he narrated the life of the Tirthankara Nemi in front of the fourfold assembly. The whole city, attracted by his most excellent speech, came there to listen to him and to have his *darsana*. Now, one day, in the course of this narration of Lord Nemi's life, he described in detail the episode pertaining to the renunciation of the Pandava brothers and their becoming Jaina monks.

The Brahmins who heard it were extremely jealous of his growing popularity and went to the king and complained to him, saying, "Lord, in the far distant past the great sage Vyasa Krsnadvaipayana had narrated the extraordinary life of Yudhisthira and his brothers, having known it by means of his





supernatural knowledge of future events. There in his work [the *Mahabharata*] it is said that towards the end of their lives the sons of Pandu went wandering among the snow-filled Himalayas and, having performed there the ritual bathing and the proper rites, they propitiated Lord Siva [that is, the *sivalinga*] established at the holy Kedara. Their minds thus filled with devotion to Lord Siva, they then met their death. But these Svetambaras, who are actually Sudras since they have abandoned the true words of the Puranas, babble things about the Pandavas in their own assemblies, things which are contrary to the *smrtis*. Because of this conduct, which is absolutely inappropriate, there is great calamity in store for you in the future. It is only proper that when your subjects are given to wrong conduct they must be restrained by the king. Therefore, O king, think deeply in your heart about what should be done in this matter, and do it." Having spoken thus, the group of Brahmins, who had been so extremely bold in their speech, fell silent.

The king replied, "The protectors of the earth do not act without contemplation and must not show disrespect to any particular faith without due consideration. Therefore these Svetambara monks should be questioned further [on this matter]. If they give us a truthful answer, then they are to be honored by us, for that is just. For our friend here, the venerable Acarya Hemacandra, is a great sage who has renounced all attachment and is free from all possessions. How could he ever speak anything untruthful? This matter therefore needs much contemplation."

The learned Brahmins also agreed and said, "So be it." Then the king had Hemacandra, the lord of the sages, summoned and questioned him, saying, "A king belongs to all and is impartial in this matter. Is it true that, according to the scriptures, the Pandavas renounced the world according to Jaina rules [that is, they became Jaina monks]?" The venerable a*carya* said, "This has been said by our ancient a*caryas* in our scriptures, and it is [equally] true that their sojourn in the Himalayas is described in the *Mahabharata*. But we do not know whether those [Pandavas] who are described in our scriptures are the same as those who are described in the work [*Mahabharata*] of sage Vyasa, or yet by still other authors in different works."

To this the king said, "But then, O sage, were there more





than one of these persons, and were they all born in ancient times?" Then the teacher said, "O king, listen to my answer. In the narrative of Vyasa itself there is the following episode about Bhisma the grandfather, who is also known as the descendant of the Ganges. At the time of entering the battlefield he told his attendants, 'At my death cremate my body only on a piece of earth which has always been pure, a place where no one has ever been cremated.' After acquitting himself justly in the war, Bhisma died. His attendants remembered his words and, lifting his body, took it to a hill. There on its top, which had never been visited by any man, they readied it [for cremation]. At that time a divine voice spoke:

> A hundred Bhismas have been cremated here,
> and three-hundred Pandavas,
> and a thousand Dronacaryas;
> As for Karnas (cremated here),
> their number is beyond counting!" 76

[Having quoted this verse from the *Mahabharata*] Hemacandra said: "Hearing this [verse], in our minds we believe

that among the hundreds of Pandavas mentioned here it is possible that some may have been Jainas. Moreover, on the Satruñjaya hilltop their images can be seen, and also in the temple dedicated to Jina Candraprabha in the city of Nasika, as well as in the great pilgrimage spot of Kedara. We have gained our knowledge of *dharma* from various sources. Let the Brahmins who are experts in the Vedas and who believe in the *smrtis* [that is, the *Mahabharata*] also be questioned now about this matter [namely, the plurality of the Pandavas]. Knowledge can be obtained from any source. Like the River Ganges it cannot be claimed by anybody as his paternal property!"

Having heard this speech, the king addressed the Brahmins, "Is what the Jaina sage says true? Give me your reply, if indeed there is truth on your side. Surely in this matter you should give only a truthful answer, since the lord of the earth must act only after due consideration. In settling this matter, mine will be the last word, since I am impartial regarding all schools of philosophy, and also because I have erected temples in honor of gods of all faiths." Not knowing what to answer, the Brahmins remained silent. The king too honored the *acarya* and said, "No fault attaches to you, not even the slightest, while you speak the truth."77 Honored thus by the king, the teacher Hema-





candra shone in the sky of Jaina teaching like the light of the midday sun.

The Brahmins lost their case precisely because they did not have a complete edition of the *Mahabharata*, one with a verse-index! I assumed that the verse quoted by Hemacandra must be found in the modern critical edition of the great Epic, and took the trouble to look it up on behalf of the defeated Brahmins. But, to my utter suprise, there was no trace of it anywhere, not even in a marginal note. Is it possible that Hemacandra composed this verse on the spot and confounded the Brahmins? If so, then he himself played, as it were, the final role of that Arhat of the Brahminic Puranas, the strange emanation of Visnu!





# NOTES

## Introduction

1. Rajendra Chandra Hazra, *Studies in the Puranic Records on Hindu Rites and Customs* (Dacca, 1948) and *Studies in the Upapuranas*, 2 vols. (Calcutta, 1958 and 1963).

2. Ludo Rocher, *The Puranas*, vol. 2, fasc. 3 of A *History of Indian Literature*, ed. Jan Gonda (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1986).

## Chapter 1

1. As pointed out most recently by Jan Gonda, *The Indra Hymns of the* Rg Veda (Leiden: E. J. Brill), 1989.

2. Alf Hiltebeitel, "Hinduism," *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 6, edited by Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 342.

3. Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Tales of Sex and Violence* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 118.

4. See *Nirukta* 1.15ff. Yaska refutes Kautsa, an opponent who questions the authority of the Vedas and asserts that Vedic *mantras* are meaningless.

5. See *Purva Mimamsa Sutras* 1.5, denoting the eternal relationship between words and their meaning; 1.26 for an assertion of the everyday quality of Vedic language; and 2.1-23 for a discussion of the significance of *arthavada*explanatory passages

that are subordinate to *codana*, or ritual injunctions, but nonetheless meaningful as passages that provide incentives to and augments of sacrificial action. The substance of Kautsa's criticisms of Yaska and Yaska's rejoinder are discussed and amplified in the first





chapter of Jaimini's *Mimamsa Sutras*. See also Francis X. Clooney, *Thinking Ritually* (Vienna: de Nobili, 1990.)

6. Rajendralala Mitra attempted a critical edition in 1892: Brhaddevata, *or an Index to the Gods of the* Rig Veda *by Saunaka, to which have been added* Arsanukramani, Chandonukramani and Anuvakanukramani *in the Form of Appendices*, Bibliotheca Indica Sanskrit Series, n.s., nos. 722, 760, 794, 819 (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1893). This edition was quickly eclipsed by Macdonell's edition in 1907; in his introduction, Macdonell roundly criticized Mitra's editorial principles. (See his *Brhaddevata*, 2 vols. Harvard Oriental Series. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1904.) The new edition, however, was well received. Moriz Winternitz's generally favorable review (*Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlande* 19 [1905]: 422-26) made only the slight demur that Macdonell may have included a larger number of redundant or superfluous lines than necessary. Isidore Scheftelowitz, who reviewed the work mainly with an interest in the *khila* portion of the *Rg Veda*, agreed with this idea and removed some lines from the text as later interpolations. (See Isidore Scheftelowitz, review of Arthur A. Macdonell's *The Brhaddevata*, *Zeitscrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 56: 420-27. See also his *Die Apokryphen des* Rgveda, pt. 1 *of Indische Forschungen* [Breslau: Verlag von M. & H. Marcus, 1906.])

7. See Laksman Sarup, Introduction to The Nighantu *and* the Nirukta: *The Oldest Indian treatise on Etymology, Philology, and Semantics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1920); *Sanskrit Text, with an Appendix Showing the Relation of the* Nirukta *with other Sanskrit Works* (Lahore: University of the Panjab, 1927); *Indices and Appendices to the* Nirukta *with an Introduction* (Lahore: University of the Panjab, 1929); *The* Nighantu *and the* Nirukta, reprint ed. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1967), 54.

8. See A. A. Macdonell, *The Brhaddevata* vol. 1, xxii, and the introduction to his edition of the *Sarvanukramani* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1886), viii, for a full discussion.

9. Muneo Tokunaga, "On the Recensions of the *Brhaddevata," Journal of the American Oriental Society* 101 no. 3 (1981): 275-86; "The Text and Legends of the *Brhaddevata*" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1979).

10. See Laurie L. Patton, "Beyond the Myth of Origins: Types of Tale-telling in Vedic Commentary," in *Myths and Fictions: Their Place in Philosophy and Religion*, ed. Shlomo Biderman (Leiden: E. J. Brill, forthcoming).

11. Ernst Windisch, in a study of Irish literature, made a conjecture that the song of Pururavas and Urvasi might well be a poem detached from its narrative context. (See Windisch, "Ueber die altirische Sage der *Táin Bó Cúalnge," Verhandlung der 33. Philologenversammlung in Gera* [1879]: 15ff.) Hermann Oldenberg picked up on this possibility in his study of the Suparna legend and, later, in his "*Akhyana*-Hymnen im *Rg Veda*" in 1885.





(See "Das altindische *Akhyana*, mit besonderer Rücksicht auf das *Suparnakhyana," Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenlandischen Gesellschaft* 37 [1883]: 54-86; and "*Akhyana* Hymnen im Rg Veda," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenlandischen Gesellschaft* 39 [1885]: 52-83.) Basing his theory on the literary style of the Pali Jataka tales, he argued that the dialogue hymns of the *Rg Veda* postulate a prose narrative as the connecting medium of the metrical parts. This resulted in a combination of prose and poetry, in which poetic verse was the high point of emotion. The older portion of the *Mahabharata* and later Vedic texts, such as the *Suparnakhyana*, also preserved this pattern. Yet Oldenberg saw the later *itihasas* as useless historically, the fanciful creations of the commentators to describe and rationalize the hymns of the *Rg Veda* that were embarrassing or puzzling to them. Karl Geldner, in his important study of Pururavas and Urvasi, argued against Oldenberg's denegration of later *itihasas*. (See Geldner, "Pururavas und Urvasi," *Vedische Studien*, Vol. 1 [Stuttgart: Verlag von W. Dohlhammer, 1889], 243-95.) Following his teacher Geldner, Emil Sieg's *Die Sagenstoffe des* Rg Veda *und die indische Itihasa-tradition* (Stuttgart: W. Kolhammer, 1902) is still regarded as the most thorough treatment of Rg Vedic legends available.

12. The ensuing twenty years resulted in specific studies of those particular stories for which Sayana gives no ritual employment (*viniyoga*), such as the Vrsakapi hymn (*Rg Veda* [hereafter cited as *RV*] 10.86), Sarama and the Panis (*RV* 10.108), the recovery of Agni (*RV* 10.51-53), Mudgala's race (*RV* 10.102), the dialogue between Pururavas and Urvasi (*RV* 10.95), Lopamudra and Agastya (*RV* 10.179), and Indra, the Maruts, and Agastya (*RV* 10.165, 170, 171). Bloomfield's "Contributions to the Interpretation of the Veda" treated the stories of Indra and Namuci, the two dogs of Yama, and the marriage of Saranyu, as well as Trita. (See Bloomfield, "Contributions to the Interpretation of the Veda 3. 1. The Story of Indra and Namuci. 2. The Two Dogs of Yama in a New Role. 3. The Marriage of Saranyu, Tvastar's Daughter." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 15 [1898]: 143-88; "Contributions to the Interpretation of the Veda 7. 6. Trita, the Scape-goat of the Gods, in Relation to *Atharva Veda* 6.112 and 113." *American Journal of Philology* 17 [1896]: 430-37.) Albrecht Weber contributed an important study, "Episches im vedischen Ritual," (*Sitzerberichte der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaft*, 38 [1891]: 769-819), which focused on the ritual use of Vedic legends and the relationship between the legends in ritual literature and in the *Mahabharata*.

13. Not surprisingly, in the first part of the twentieth-century scholars reacted against this theory about the origins of Vedic hymns, in all of its variations. The "*anti-akhyana*" reaction believed that the Rg Vedic hymns were coherent enough on their own. Sylvain Levi, in his work, *Le Théâtre Indien*, held that these legends represented some sort of cohesive dramatic scene, independent of any supporting prose apparatus. (See Levi, *Le Théâtre Indien*, 2 vols. [Paris: College de France, Libraire Honore Champion, 1963.], translated by N. Mukherji as *The Theatre of India*, 2 vols. [Calcutta:





Writers' Workshop, 1980].) In addition to Lévi's work, various other scholars took positions in various degrees of extremity against the *akhyana* theory. In *Mysterium und Mimus im* Rg Veda (Leipzig: H. Haessel Verlag, 1908), Leopold von Schroeder went further than Lévi and asserted that they were ritual dramas. Later, Jarl Charpentier joined the debate by rejecting both the drama as well as the *akhyana* theory, stating that, with the exception of four hymns, the Rg Vedic hymns could be read as epic poetry without the addition of prose. (Jarl Charpentier, *Die Suparnasage: Untersuchungen zur Altindischen Literatur und Sagengeschichte* [Uppsala: A.-b. Akademiska Bokhandeln i Kommission, 1922].) J. Hertel, working independently of Levi, rejected the *akhyana* theory in several articles. Moriz Winternitz tried to reconcile the idea by postulating that some of the *samvada* hymns were ballads, in which everything is told in versified speeches, some were *akhyana*, poetic fragments that did have the nonsurviving prose element, and some were strophes that belonged to ritual dramas. (See "Dialog, Akhyana, und Drama in der Indischen Literatur," *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 23 [1909].) In a similar vein, A. B. Keith, in "The Vedic *akhyana* and the Indian Drama" (*Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, pt. 2. [1911]: 979-1009), in one great sweep rejects both the a*khyana* and the drama theory, stating that there is not enough evidence for either. The debate about the *akhyana* theory died down in the early twenties, and the fourth period is marked by a notable silence on the subject of Vedic legends. Interestingly, in the later sixties there do exist attempts to reconsider and reaffirm the *akhyana* theory. Ludwig Alsdorf attempted to vindicate the *akhyana* theory from the perspective of Jaina literature. (See Ludwig Alsdorf, "The *Akhyana* Theory Reconsidered," *Journal of the Oriental Institute of Baroda* 13, no. 3 [1964]: 195-207.)

14. For a full account of this legend, see Sadgurusisya on the *Sarvanukramani*, 155-58; Sayana in his introduction to *Rg Veda* 10.95; *Satapatha Brahmana* 5.68ff.; 11.5.1.1; 3.4.1.22. The legend is called an *akhyana* in the *Nirukta* 5.13 (s.v. "Urvasi"), 10.46,47 (sv. "Pururavas"), and 11.36 (s.v. "Urvasi"). Also see *Kathaka Samhita* 8.10. For secondary literature, see Albrecht Weber, *Indische Studien* vol. 1 (Berlin: F. Dummler, 1850-63; Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1865-98), 196; Hermann Oldenberg, *Vedic Hymns*, Sacred Books of the East (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1964) vol. 46; 28,323. Ernst Geldner, in *Vedische Studien* treats the whole story historically (see Richard Pischel, and Karl F. Geldner, *Vedische Studien* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer. vol. 1 [1889]: 243-84.)

15. See the *Visnu Purana* (4.6.35-93), where, instead of being instructed, Pururavas himself discovers that he must use the wood of the *asvattha* tree and recite the correct *mantras* in order to become a *gandharva*.

16. The word used by the *Brhaddevata* is *abhirupa*, "lovely," but in the context of the use of *sarasi* and *iva* in the verse, and in the context of the *Satapatha Brahmana* story, it is more likely the earlier reading was *ati-*





*rupa*, "the form of a swan." The *Brhaddevata* (*BD*) implies that she is in some other form, although it does not

specifically mention the swan.

17. The story of Pururavas is told in the *Visnu Purana* 4.6.35-93. It is also mentioned in the *Vayu*, *Matsya, Vamana*, *Padma*, and *Bhagavata Puranas*, as well as in the *Mahabharata*.

18. 9.18-42. This Purana recounts that Ila is originally a woman, who because of a boon had been turned into a man, Sudyumna. Sudyumna then roams the forest, interrupts Siva and Parvati, and is turned back into a woman. Upon the intercession of Vasitha on Sudyumna's behalf, Siva decides that every year Sudyumna will spend six months as a man, and six months as a woman.

19. Geldner is of the opinion that it is the close relationship between Indra and the *apsarases* in the Epic literature that brought Indra into this episode. (*Vedische Studien 1*: 256 n. 2) Yet if one looks at the stories in terms of their thematic emphases, one might well argue as above, that the story is given a newly theological thrust as a result of the more Puranic perspective of the *itihasa* interpolations.

20. The *Tandya Brahmana* (1.8.2.5), among others, does underscore this association of the *rsis* with the gods: "The seminal fluid of Indra, having his characteristic power, was discharged threefold. The third born was Bhrgu." Durga, commenting on the *Nirukta*, writes, "Prajapati took his own seminal fluid and sacrificed. From the blazing fire Bhrgu was born; Angiras rose from the ashes. Then the two just born said, 'Seek the third also here;' thus the *rsi* who sprang up was called 'Atri.' Not yet satisfied, they began to dig and the seer thus produced was called 'Vaikhanasa.'" (Cf. the story of Trita, "the third" in *BD* 3.132-7.) The *Aitareya Brahmana* story builds a complete cosmogony out of this motif. The seed of Prajapati was surrounded with Agni, and the Maruts blew upon it, but Agni could not make it move. It was then surrounded with Agni Vaisvanara, and then the Maruts blew upon it, and it moved. The text goes on:

> The first part of the seed that was kindled became Aditya, the second became Bhrgu, which Varuna took for himself. The third was brilliant [*adidet*] and became the Adityas. The coals became the Angirases, born from the coals. Brhaspati came forth from the coals, which, after being quenched, blazed up again; and from the extinguished coals emerged black cattle, from the reddened earth came the ruddy cattle. The ash there crept about in diverse formsbuffalo, the cow, the antelope, camel and the donkey, and these ruddy ones. (3.34)

21. Other texts, such as the *Nirukta*, attest to Bhrgu's unusual birth, although they do not directly associate him with a god. The *Nirukta* (3.17) tells this story:

> Bhrgu is produced in flames, that is, one who, although being roasted, was not burnt. Angiras [was born] from live coals. Live coals [are so called because] they leave a mark, or they are bright. They said, "Seek



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> the third in this very place." Thus Atri [not three] is so called, Vaikhanasa is so called from being dug out, the root *khan*. Bharadvaja is so called from being brought up, the root *bhr*. Virupa [is so called] from being multiform.

22. See Sieg, *Sagenstoffe*, pp. 105-8 on the birth of Agastya. Also see *Sarvanukramani* 1.166 and Sayana on *RV* 7.33.11. The *Nirukta* tale is also similar to its counterpart above. It tells how, upon seeing the *apsaras*, the seminal fluid of Mitra and Varuna fell down, and it is to this event that Rg *Veda* 7.33.1 refers: "O Vasistha, you are the son of Mitra and Varuna."

23. That is, *kumbha* is a unit of measure, like an English bushel.

24. This phrase could mean that the fish, or Matsya, mentioned above, turned into Vasitha. Since they are named as two separate sages, however, this is unlikely.

25. *Sraistyakarmanah*, "to be expressive of excellence."

26. *Karmani*. See *RV* 7.33.11 and *Taittiriya Samhita* 3.5.2 for similar usages.

27. *Mahabharata* 3.101.14; 12.291.7ff.; 13.143.18; 13.102.1ff. This passage's relationship with the *Mahabharata* is close in another respect. In *Mahabharata* 1.7.59-60, the same list of the daughters of Daksa appears, with Pradha and Kapila substituted for Varistha and Surabhi.

28. *Agni Purana* 206.1-12; *Bhagavata Purana* 6.18.5-6; *Matsya Purana* 201.1-39; *Narasimha Purana* 6.1.ff.; *Padma Purana* 5.22.19-40; *Siva Purana* 45.23-26; *Visnu Purana* 4.5.1.ff.; *Visnudharmottara Purana* 1.117.1ff.

29. John E. Mitchiner, *Traditions of the Seven Rsis* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1982), 77.

30. Mitchiner, *Traditions of the Seven Rsis*, 86-87.

31. *Ramayana* 1.45.ff.; 1.69.17ff.; 2.102ff.; *Mahabharata* 1.59; 1.9ff.; 1.60.33-35; 12.200.1-46; *Harivamsa* 3.45-49; 31.100-9; *Markandeya Purana* 104.1-9; *Vayu Purana* 1.30.72-73; 2.3.1; 2.4.109ff.; 2.5.101; 2.6.43-44; 2.6.76; 2.8.334, etc.

32. So, too, in the main plot of the *Mahabharata*, Satyavati's daughter-in-law Kausalya proves herself to be a lover of *dharma*, since she lies with the seer Vyasa at her mother's command, thus giving birth to Dhrtarastra, the Kaurava king and a principle character in the *Mahabharata*.

33. For instance, the story of Trita, told by both the *Brhaddevata* and the *Mahabharata*, is used in the *Mahabharata* to illustrate the *dharma* of the sage who, set upon and abandoned by his cruel brothers, can perform a sacrifice in his head and convince the gods to help him.





34. One might wonder why this *anukramani* was chosen for expansion, and not others. Although nothing can be firmly concluded, some speculations are persuasive. The fact that the list of deities is chosen above the list of meters, *rsi*s, and others is not insignificant. If one assumes the *Brhaddevata* to be from the early Purana period, when the first Puranas were being collated and formed as specifically theological statements, it may well be no accident that the Vedic list of deities would be singled out as the most appropriate point of expansion. Gods, and not meters or *pada*s, are the most persuasive means of explaining the Veda.

35. Moreover, it must be noted that its expansion is largely narrative in nature. Unlike the core text of the *Devatanukramani*, the ritual application of *mantra* is not the only motivation behind the new, expanded text, the *Brhaddevatanukramani*. Narrative and commentary take on a more central role. One might put it another way: commentary on the Veda is no longer concerned exclusively with step-by-step details of the *mantra*'s ritual use but also with other forms of the explanation of *mantra*. To be sure, narratives are also part of the *Brahmanas*, but they act more as handmaidens to the larger project of ritual philosophy and do not provide the kind of grounding and explanation which they do in the *Brhaddevata*. And, unlike the *Sarvanukramani*, where the *itihasas* are simply named or signaled, the *Brhaddevata's itihasas* are actually related. The *anukramani*, the list, becomes embedded within narrative.

> This "narrative" tendency of the *Brhaddevata* is corroborated by statements within the text itself. Several parts of the shorter version of the text actually express divergences between Saunaka and the writer of the *Brhaddevatathe* interpretation of the *sukta*. For instance, the *Brhaddevata* author is more inclined to take the "elaborate" view as to who the deities are in any given suktaincorporating all the speakers of the scene portrayed. Thus, in its discussion of *RV* 8.96:13-15, the *Brhaddevata* (6.116-17) believes that Indra, Agastya, and the Maruts are the deities of the triplet, whereas Saunaka regards Indra alone as its deity. More importantly, the *Brhaddevata* considers several hymns to be "narratives" or "stories," disagreeing with Saunaka and appealing to other early Vedic authorities. For instance, the *Brhaddevata* (8.11-12) considers *RV* 10.102, the story of the race of Mudgala, to be a narrative hymn, following the Vedic interpreter Sakatayana, although Saunaka says it is addressed to Visvedevas. Moreover, the *Brhaddevata* (6.107) seems to side with Vedic interpreters Yaska and Baghuri, who call *Rg Veda* 8.91the story of Apala and Indra an *itihasa*, while Saunaka believes it is addressed to Indra.

36. Wendy O'Flaherty, *The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976), 79.

37. O'Flaherty, *Origins of Evil*, 79.

38. O'Flaherty, *Origins of Evil*, 80.

39. O'Flaherty, *Origins of Evil*, 82.





40. See Laurie L. Patton, "Beyond the Myth of Origins: Types of Tales Telling in Vedic Commentary," forthcoming.

41. *Turasat*, "overpowering the mighty" or "overpowering quickly."

42. Literally, "touched the hand with the hand."

43. *Jaiminiya Brahmana* 1.228, cited in O'Flaherty, *Tales of Sex and Violence*, 75-76.

44. *Aitareya Brahmana* 6.20; *Jaiminiya Upanisad Brahmana* 3.3.710; *Mahabharata* 1.165.135-145.

45. See, for example, the *Vayu Purana* 1.59.79-105; *Matsya Purana* 145.81-91.

46. This and following *sloka* are quoted by Sadgurusisya on *RV* 2.43. See Macdonell's *Sarvanukramani* on *RV* 2.43, 104. Also see *Rg Vidhana* 1.31.3, 4.

47. The phrase "praised Indra" is taken from the following verse, *BD* 6.118.

48. Geldner posits that the dialogue is between Visnu, who recites the first verse, and Indra, who recites the rest of the verses in reply (see his *Rg Veda*, 2: 428).

49. Cited in Cornelia Dimmitt and J. A. B. van Buitenen, *Classical Hindu Mythology* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978), 269-70.

50. Mitchiner, *Traditions*, 210.

51. Cited in Dimmitt and van Buitenen, *Classical Hindu Mythology* 174-76.

52. If read in this particular way, one might remark upon how the *anukramani*, or indexical genre of the *Brhaddevata* plays an important role in this development. One moves from the *Rg Veda*, where the *mantras* are recited, to the Brahmanas, where the *mantras* are explained according to their sacrificial usage. In the Brahmana, one can detect the increased usage *of pratikas*the first syllables of a verseto refer to particular *mantras*; yet the discourse about *mantras* remains fairly concretized in discussion of sacrificial procedures. In the *anukramanis*, the *pratika* is virtually the sole means of reference to *mantras*. While the contents of the *mantra* are indeed implied by those *pratikas*, they are nonetheless a shortened form of *mantra*. Indeed, if one is to take seriously the claim that *anukramanis* too are transcendental knowledge, then they function metonymically. As parts, they symbolize the entire *mantra*inaugurating the process whereby smaller and smaller parts can stand for the entire utterance. As sacrificial performance becomes less and less a concern, in texts like the early Puranas, the actual contents of the *mantra* are less necessary. Thus the simple references to "appropriate *mantras*" or "*mantras* praising Prajapati" may be a later point in the process of abstraction that begins with the *pratika*.



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53. Jan Gonda, "The Hindu Trinity," in *Anthropos* 63 (1968): 212-26; also in *Selected Studies*, vol. 4, *History of Ancient Indian Religion* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975), 27-41. See also H. Sh. Joshi, *Origin and Development of Dattareya Worship in Indra*. (Baroda: University of Baroda, 1965), chap. 1.

54. *Rg Veda* 5 3.6.9; 8.35.3; 1.139.11; *Atharva Veda* 10.7.13; 10.9.12.

55. *Taittiriya Samhita* 6.6.8.2 and *Satapatha Brahmana* 4.5.4.1.

56. *Satapatha Brahmana* 2.17.5.32; 11.2.3; *Kausitaki Brahmana* 8.8; and *Nirukta* 7.5; 88. For Surya as part of the trinity conception, see D. P. Pandey, "Surya" (Ph.D. diss., University of Leiden, 1939), 84ff.

57. Gonda, "Hindu Trinity," 216.

58. The *RV* verses to Agni (3.26.7; 3.20.2; 1.146.1, among others) show the threefold division of this god. *Brhaddevata* 1.90-96 follows a similar pattern.

59. *Satapatha Brahmana* 6.1.1.5; 8.3.4.15; with the whole of *brahman* 7.3.1.42.

60. *Taittiriya Upanisad* 3.1.1; 2.8.1; also see *Mundaka Upanisad* 1.1.1.

61. See, for instance, *Nirukta* 9.4-7 where, among other things, the word derivations for frogs, boards, rushes, and dice are

given as deities of the earthly sphere, without particular reference to their "earthly" properties.

62. The citations of joint actions of the Puranic triad are myriad: *Agni Purana* 61.27; 66.12; 78.31; 92.45; *Markandeya Purana* 1.44; 16.89; 17.10; 20.34. Also see *Matsya Purana* 265.4, where only the man who is friendlily disposed to all three gods is allowed to erect and consecrate a sanctuary.

63. *Kurma Purana* 1.14.4-97; see Dimmitt and van Buitenen, *Classical Hindu Mythology*, 174.

64. *Kurma* 1.10.1-38.

65. Gonda, "Hindu Trinity," 220-21.

Chapter 2

1. See Bruce L. Sullivan, *Krsna Dvaipayana Vyasa and the* Mahabharata: *A New Interpretation* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1990); Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Dreams, Illusion, and Other Realities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), chap. 4; Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Other Peoples' Myths: The Cave of Echoes* (New York: Macmillan, 1988), chap. 3 and 7; and Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, "Horses and Snakes in the *Adi Parvan* of the





*Mahabharata*," in *Aspects of India: Essays in Honor of Edward Cameron Dimock*, ed. Margaret Case and N. Gerald Barrier (New Delhi: American Institute of Indian Studies and Manohar, 1986), 16-44; A. K. Ramanujan, "Where Mirrors are Windows: Towards an Anthology of Reflections," *History of Religions* 28: 3 (February, 1989), 1-30.

2. *Bhagavata Purana*, with the commentary of Sridhara (Bombay: Sri Venkatesvara Steam Press, 1832). Henceforth cited as *BP*.

3. *Mahabharata* (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1933-69). Henceforth cited as *M*.

4. *Devibhagavata Purana* (Benares, 1960). Henceforth cited as *DBP*.

5. See Brian K. Smith, "Exorcising the Transcendent: Strategies for Defining Hinduism and Religion," *History of Religions* 27, no. 1 (August 1987): 32-55.

6. Though even the Upanisads, which are part of *sruti*, list the chain of their transmission *after* the divine revelation took place. See *Brhadaranyaka Upanisad* 2.6.1-3 for one of several very long lists of teachers.

7. See J. A. B. van Buitenen, "On the Archaism of the *Bhagavata-Purana*," in *Krishna: Myths, Rites, and Attitudes*, ed. Milton Singer (Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1966), 23-40.

8. But it might well be Vyasa, who is often called the "great sage." Ganesh Vasudeo Tagare (*The Bhagavata Purana*, vol. 1, Ancient Indian Tradition and Mythology Series, vols. 7-10 [Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1978], 6), identifies the "great sage" as Vyasa.

9. The text calls him "Son of Romaharsana" (literally, "he who causes the hair to stand on end," a common epithet of great storytellers), and Sridhara further identifies him as Ugrasravas, a famous bard and a key figure in the transmission of the *Mahabharata*.

10. Eric A. Huberman, "Language, Love, and Silence: Readings of Separation in the Sanskrit Epic, Poetic, and Puranic Traditions" (Ph.D. diss., Department of Middle East Languages and Cultures, Columbia University, 1990).

11. See O'Flaherty, "Horses and Snakes."

12. At the end of this episode (*BP* 1.18.9), the Suta says to the sages, "Thus I have told you what you asked me, the story about Pariksit, as it is connected with the story of Krsna Vasudeva."

13. Suka is described as an *avadhuta*, one who has "shaken off" all social ties and social conventions; it is often used as a pejorative term for a yogi.

14. *BP* 12.5-6. There are a few further chapters of conversation between Saunaka and Suta involving a story about Markandeya and the child





Visnu in the cosmic waters, and then the final praise and summing up of the *Bhagavata Purana*.

15. It is perhaps appropriate that my decision to write this essay about a story about pupils surpassing teachers was inspired by a suggestion from David Shulman, who was once my student.

16. See the birth of Skanda, *Mahabharata* 3.213-16, 13.83-86, and so on. See Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Siva: The Erotic Ascetic* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

17. See Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Women, Androgynes, and Other Mythical Beasts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 267.

18. This syndrome, known from other myths as well, makes sense of what in our culture is a joke, the paradox of the man who says, "I'm a bachelor, and so was my father." The equivalent in Indian parlance is the paradox of "the son of a barren woman," a catchphrase that Suka uses several times in the *Devibhagavata* to characterize the meaninglessness of the householder life.

19. Janaka is often depicted as a learned king at whose court the great sages such as Yajnavalkya propounded their doctrines: *Brhadaranyaka Upanisad* 3.1.1, 4.1.1. Janaka himself is presented as a paradigm of knowledge in *Kausitaki Upanisad* 4.1.

20. William K. Mahony, "Flying Priests, Yogins, and Shamans in Early Hinduism and Buddhism" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1982).

21. Cf. in Asvaghosa's *Buddhacarita*, the description of Gautama Sakyamuni leaving the harem.

22. Cf. Narada and the sons of Daksa: *Mahabharata* 1.70; *Bhagavata Purana* 6.5. See Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Hindu Myths* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), 46-48; and O'Flaherty, *Siva*, 70-77.

23. *Chandogya Upanisad* 5.3-10; *Brhadaranyaka Upanisad* 6.2.115.

24. The three strands (*gunas*) or components of matter (*prakrti*) according to Sankhya philosophy are darkness or entropy (*tamas*), energy or passion (*rajas*), and lucidity or goodness (*sattva*).

25. *Brahman*, the godhead.

26. See *Rg Veda* 10.95 (see Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *The Rig Veda: An Anthology*, [Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981]), *Satapatha Brahmana* 11.5.1; *Mahabharata* 3, app. 1, 6.36-162; and Kalidasa's play, *Vikramorvasiya*.

27. Though this is a fairly normal thing to say to console a parent grieving for a lost child, it may here also be a pun on the name of Vyasa's granddaughter, Kirti (Fame).





28. See the discussion of shadow doubles in Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Dreams, Illusion, and Other Realities*.

29. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Frank Justus Miller (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974) 3.341-401.

30. Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 3.402-510.

31. See O'Flaherty, *Siva*, 148-71.

32. *Krauñca* birds.

33. *Ramayana* (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1960-75) 1.1-2. Henceforth cited as *R*.

34. I cite here the summary by Sheldon Pollock on page 384 of his translation of vol. 2 *Ayodhyakanda* of *The Ramayana of Valmiki*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986). Pollock also cites folk variants of the theme discussed by Walter Ruben, "Vier Liebestragödien des Ramayana," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 100 (1950), 287355, 294 n. 1.

35. The story of the child Visnu on the banyan leaf, floating in the cosmic waters, is not told in this Purana. But another variant of it, the story of Markandeya stumbling upon the child Visnu in the cosmic waters, is the main subject of the final chapters of the *Bhagavata Purana*.

36. *Rg Veda* 1.164.20; *Mundaka Upanisad* 3.1.1; *Svetasvatara Upanisad* 4.6.

37. *Svetasvatara Upanisad* 4.4.

38. The image of the parrot as mimic appears in the translator's note to verse 1.1.4 of the *Devibhagavata Purana (The Sri Mad Devi Bhagavatam*, vol. 26 of *The Sacred Books of the Hindus*, trans. Swami Vijnanananda [Allahabad 1921-23]). Where in the text the sage Saunaka says to the Suta, "You have learnt the eighteen Puranas from Vyasa the son of Satyavati," the translator remarks: "It is not that you have read them like a parrot; but you have thoroughly grasped the meaning of them all as you have learnt them from Vyasa himself, the son of Satyavati."

39. S. Sorensen, *Index to the Names in the Mahabharata* (London: Ernest Benn, 1904), 219.

40. Cited by S. K. Belvalkar on page 2223 of the Poona edition of the *Santi Parvan*.

Chapter 3

1. See Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Other Peoples' Myths: The Cave of Echoes* (New York: Macmillan, 1988), chap. 3, for a discussion of the fluidity





of written texts in India. See also the essay by V. Narayana Rao in this volume.

2. See Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976), 157 n. 98.

3. See Ludo Rocher, *The Puranas*, vol. 2, fasc. 3 of *A History of Indian Literature*, ed. Jan Gonda (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1986), 230, for a discussion, without date, of the "Kedara Khanda."

4. This, and much of the ensuing discussion of the role of the *Skanda Purana* in Indian culture, I owe to a conversation with V. Narayana Rao, on May 24, 1991.

5. Velcheru Narayana Rao, "Epics and Ideologies: Six Telugu Folk Epics," in *Another Harmony: New Essays on the Folklore of India*, ed. Stuart H. Blackburn and A. K. Ramanujan (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), 131-65.

6. For a similar, but far more detailed, argument for the integrity of the laws of Manu, see the introduction to Wendy Doniger and Brian K. Smith, trans. *The Laws of Manu* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991).

7. Rather than tackle the *Skanda Purana* as a whole in this brief article, let me confine myself to the "Kedara Khanda." We are justified, I think, in taking this book as a self-contained literary work; Ludo Rocher confirms what has long been suspected, that the "Kedara Khanda" was composed at a time and place distinct from the other Khandas of the *Skanda Purana*, even from the other portions of the "Mahesvara Khanda." Another text, also called the "Kedara Khanda" and said to be a part of the *Skanda Purana* (but not of the "Mahesvara Khanda") was published by the same press (Bombay: Venkatesvara Steam Press, n.d.). This is an entirely different work, much longer than the text that I am using here (the one to which Ludo Rocher also refers).

8. This is particularly true of the so-called *sthala-puranas* of vernacular traditions (see David Dean Shulman, *Tamil Temple Myths* [Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980]), but it also applies to several Sanskrit Puranas, or, more usually, sections of Sanskrit Puranas.

9. This way of organizing myths is already found in the *Mahabharata*, which groups several cycles of stories around journeys to holy places.

10. There are the solar and lunar lineages of the great Puranas, but also the minor lineages of other Puranas.

11. Ludo Rocher, *Puranas*, 230, citing John D. Plott, *Bhakti at the Crossroads* (New York: Carlton Press, 1971), 85.

12. See the appendix for an outline of the plot of the "Kedara Khanda."





13. *Padma Purana* 1.1.

14. *Sivapurana Mahatmya* (Benares, 1964), 2.1-40.

15. See O'Flaherty, *Origins of Evil*, 317-18.

16. *Bhagavata Purana* 12.8-10.

17. *Visnudharmottara Purana* 1.236.1-21.

18. *Linga Purana* 1.30.1-25; *Karma Purana* 2.35.12-38.

19. See O'Flaherty, *Origins of Evil*, for the confluence of Vedic and devotional ideas of reciprocal affection between gods and humans.

20. *Mahabharata* 3.163.

21. Thus, for example, the identity of Kutsa and Indra, Kutsa's father, causes Indra's wife to sleep with Indrauntil Indra mutilates Kutsa "so that she can tell them apart." See *Jaiminiya Brahmana* 3.199-200 (translated by Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty in *Tales of Sex and Violence* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985]), 74-76.

22. *Linga Purana* 1.104-5; *Siva Purana* 2.4.13-20.

23. Bali does it in chap. 9; Nahusa, in chap. 15.

24. See the theme of the overcrowding of heaven, in O'Flaherty, *Origins of Evil*, chap. 9.

25. There is a pun here on twice-born (*dvi-ja*):birds reborn from the egg, and Brahmins reborn at initiation. (Teeth are also called "twice-born").

26. The leaves of the *bilva* tree are used in the worship of Siva.

27. By eating the food, the dog, an unclean animal, inadvertently made the Kirata and his wife participants in the act of giving food, a part of the *puja* prescribed for the Night of Siva. This is not mentioned in the text itself, but the table of contents helpfully points it out.

28. *Mahabharata* 1.16.39-40.

29. *Bhagavata Purana* 8.12.12-35; *Agni Purana* 3.17-20; *Siva Purana* 3.20.3-7; *Brahmanda Purana* 4.10.41-77). See Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Women, Androgynes, and Other Mythical Beasts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 320.

30. *Rg Veda* 10.95.15.

31. *The Laws of Manu* 9.17.

32. *Mahabharata* 5.12-17.

33. *Mahabharata* 1.98.1-5. For the *Brhaddevata* version, see Laurie Patton's article in this volume.





34. But other texts do connect Brhaspati's rape of Utathya's wife, Mamata, with his own cuckolding by Candra, his pupil. This occurs, for instance, in a Telugu text, the *Tarasasankavijayamu* by Samukhamu Venkata Krsnappa Nayaka; personal communication from David Shulman, July 22, 1991.

35. *Visnu Purana* 5.27; *Harivamsa* 99.1-49.

36. *Bhagavata Purana* 10.55.7.

37. There is a significant double entendre here, both "I am looking for *my* husband" and "I am seeking *a* husband."

38. Another pun, on *guna* ("virtue" or "quality or characteristic"): "You are devoid of virtue" can also mean, applied to the supreme godhead, "You have no qualities" (*nirguna*).

39. T. A. Gopinatha Rao, *Elements of Hindu Iconography*, vol. 2, pt. 1 (Madras, 1916), 322-23.

40. *The Laws of Manu* 3.34.

41. Personal communication from David Shulman, June 17, 1991.

Chapter 4

1. Ganti Jogi Somayaji, ed., *Telugu Documents: Being Petitions Etc. in Telugu Preserved in the Oriental Collections in the National Archives of India* (Waltair: Andhra University Press, 1957), 63-9.

2. Allasani Peddanna, *Manucaritramu*, translated by Hank Heifetz and V. Narayana Rao (unpublished manuscript). 1.18-22.

3. Ludo Rocher, *The Puranas*, vol. 2, fasc. 3 of *A History of Indian Literature*, ed. Jan Gonda (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1986), 24-30.

4. The verse reads: *sargas ca pratisargas ca vamso manvantarani ca/ vamsanucaritam ceti puranam pañcalaksanam*. My translation follows the paradigmatic one given by Horace Hayman Wilson in his introduction to his translation of the *Visnu Purana* (1840), iv-v.

5. Vans Kennedy, *Researches into the Affinity of Ancient and Hindu Mythology* (London: Longmans, 1831), 153n.

6. Rocher, *Puranas*, 29.

7. Pandurang Vaman Kane, *History of Dharmasastra*, vol. 5.2 (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1962), 841.

8. Rocher, *Puranas*, 30.

9. Rocher, *Puranas*, 30.





10. Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), 85-89.

11. *Sukraniti*. (Varanasi: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series, 1968), 2.180. The verse reads: *sahitya sastra nipunah sangitajñas ca susvarah/ sargadi pañcakajñata ca sa vai pauranikah smrtah*.

12. For a more detailed study of this story in its folk and Purana versions, see Velcheru Narayana Rao, "Epics and Ideologies," in *Another Harmony*, ed. Stuart Blackburn and A. K. Ramanujan, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986).

13. Vatsyayana's commentary on Gautama's *Nyayadarsana* (ed. Swami Dwarikadasa Sastri. Varanasi: Bharatiya Vidya Prakasan, 1966), 4.1.62.

14. This statement is often made in books on Sanskrit poetics, including Mammata's *Kavyaprakasa*.

15. Velcheru Narayana Rao, "Texts Without Authors and Authors Without Texts" (Paper presented at the Annual Conference on South Asia, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1985).

16. Quoted by Eluripati Anantaramayya, Introduction to *Visnupuranam* (Gunturu: Anantasahiti, 1979), 45. The verse reads: *vyaso vetti suko vetti raja vetti na vetti va/ sridharah sakalam vetti srinrsimhaprasadatah*.

17. The saying goes: *itihasapuranani bhidyante lokagauravat*.

18. A slightly different version of this oft cited verse appears in *The Mahabharata* (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1942), 3, Appendix 1, #32, lines 65-70.

19. *Naradiya Purana* 1.60-61: *puranam sarvasastranam prathamam brahmana smrtam/anantaram ca vaktrebhyo vedas tasya vinisrutah*.

20. *Markandeya Purana* (ed. Satyavrata Simha. Sitapuri, 1984), 45.20.

21. Cornelia Dimmit and J. A. B. van Buitenen, *Classical Hindu Mythology: A Reader in the Sanskrit Puranas* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978), 5.

22. Bammera Potana, *Srimahabhagavatamu* (Hyderabad: Andhra Pradesh Sahitya Akademi, 1964), 10.8-13.

Chapter 5

1. David Dean Shulman, *Tamil Temple Myths: Sacrifice and Divine marriage in the South Indian Saiva tradition* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980).





2. U. Ve. Caminataiyar (1855-1942), *En Carittiram* (Cennai (Madras): U. Ve. Ca. Nul Nilaiyam, 1982).

3. P. K. Rajasekhara (ed.), *Janapada Mahakavya Maleya Madesvara* (two vols.) (Mysore: Samyukta Prakasana, 1973).

4. See "Two Realms of Kannada Folklore," in Stuart Blackburn and A. K. Ramanujan (eds.) *Another Harmony, New Essays in South Asian Folklore* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

5. Roland Barthes, "Theory of the Text," in Robert Young (ed.) *Untying the Text: a Post-structuralist Reader* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), 39.

6. See "Repetition in the Mahabharata," in Arvind Sharma (ed.), *Essays on the Mahabharata* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991).

7. In these characterizations, I'm indebted to the researches of Ji. Sam. Paramasivayya (especially in *Daksina Karnataka Janapada Kavyaprakaaragalu*, Mysore: University of Mysore, 1979) and P. K. Rajasekhara (ibid., and his Ph.D. dissertation, *Daksina Karnatakada Janapada Puranagalu*, University of Mysore, 1980).

Chapter 6

I wish to thank Velcheru Narayana Rao and Galit Hasan-Rokem for their wisdom, and to absolve them of responsibility for the instances when I stubbornly ignored it. This publication has been supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

1. On the *Bhagavata* and the considerable scholarly literature devoted to it, see Ludo Rocher, *The Puranas*, vol. 2, fasc. 3 of

A *History of Indian Literature*, ed. J. Gonda (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1986), 138-51. On dating, see F. Hardy, *Viraha-bhakti: The Early History of Krsna devotion* in *South India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), 486-88. The composition of the text is studied in Hardy, *Viraha-bhakti*, 483-547; J. A. B. van Buitenen, "On the Archaism of the *Bhagavata-Purana*," in *Krishna: Myths, Rites, and Attitudes*, ed. Milton Singer (Honolulu: East-West Press, 1966), 23-40. See also the recent study by D. Pocock, "Art and Theology in the *Bhagavata Purana*," in *The Word and the World: Fantasy, Symbol and Record*, ed. Veena Das (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1986), 9-40.

2. We may mention the well-known Tamil version by Cevvaiccutuvar (late fifteenth to early sixteenth century).

3. See the introduction to the Vavilla Ramasvamisastrulu and Sons edition of *Kucelopakhyanamu* (Madras, 1966), 4-5.

4. I have discussed this pattern at some length, with further examples, in "Sage, Poet, and Hidden Wisdom in Medieval India," in S. N.





Eisenstadt and I. F. Silver (eds.), *Cultural Traditions and Worlds of Knowledge: Explorations in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Greenwich, Conn., and London: JAI Press), 1988, 109-37.

5. See the afterward in V. Narayana Rao and Hank Heifetz, *For the Lord of the AnimalsPoems from the Telugu: The Kalahastisvarasatakamu of Dhurjati* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987).

6. Potana also informs us that it was Rama who revealed himself to him and inspired him to compose the Telugu *Bhagavatamu*: 1.14-16. (I have used the critical edition published by Telugu Visvavidyalayam [Hyderabad, 1986.])

7. Note, for example, the founding of the famous Ahobilam Mutt in 1398; see N. Jagadeesan, *History of Sri Vaishnavism in the Tamil Country (Post-Ramanuja*) (Madurai: Koodal Publishers, 1977), 154-58. This is but one example of a much more widespread pattern of institutional growth, related in part to the migration northward of important Tamil Srivaisnava families and their integration into the institutional structure of Andhra Vaisnava shrines. Compare K. Sundaram, *The Simhachalam Temple*, 2d ed. (Simhachalam: Simhachalam Devasthanam, 1984), 78-79. We may also recall the emergence of Vaisnava liturgical literature in Telugu, of a completely new type in Andhra, toward the end of the fifteenth century in the Tallapaka corpus from Tirupati.

8. See pages 91-92 and 146-49 in the introduction to the Telugu *Bhagavatamu* (Telugu Visvavidyalayam critical edition); in English, D. Venkatadhvani, *Pothana* (Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1983), 32-42, 77-78.

9. Cf. Velcheru Narayana Rao, *Telugulo kavita viplavala svarupam* (Vijayavada: Visalandhra Pracuranalayam, 1978), 29-49 (especially 4647).

10. Examples are too numerous to require exposition, but we may cite by way of illustration the outstanding Telugu *kavya* by Peddana, *Manucaritramu*, an adaptation of an episode from the *Markandeyapurana*. In some cases the *prabandha* may follow upon a Telugu version of the Purana as a whole. The same process occurs, of course, in Sanskrit, with the appearance of *mahakavyas* based on selected episodes from *itihasa-purana*.

11. See the cogent remarks on the Purana frame by V. Narayana Rao, "Poetics of a Purana in Telugu: Potana's *Maha Bhagavata*" (manuscript, 1979).

12. See my paper "Toward a Historical Poetics of the Sanskrit Epics," *International Folklore Review*, 1991, pp. 9-12.

13. See Rocher, *Puranas*, 24-30, 53-59.

14. Technically, this frame is itself part of a wider one involving the Suta's recitation to the sages of Vyasa's text, which the Suta had heard Suka





recite to Pariksit. The internal composition of the *Bhagavata*'s frame-story and its linkages to the rest of the text represent important keys to the specific dynamics and vision of this text. See chapter 2 of the present volume.

15. See Gail, *Bhakti im Bhagavatapurana*, Münchener Indologische Studien, vol. 6 (Wiesbaden, 1969), 20-38; Hardy, *Viraha-bhakti*, 494-97, 538-41. Surendranath Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy*, vol. 4 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), aptly describes the philosophy of the *Bhagavata* as a "monistic transformation of Sankhya" (p. 33, highlighting the metaphysical passages of the eleventh *skandha)*; "the monistic tendency which regards all worldly experiences as illusory is so remarkably stressed that it nearly destroys the realistic note which is a special feature of the Sankhya schools of thought" (p. 32). Note the distinctiveness of the *Bhagavata* in this respect from the later development of Tamil Srivaisnavism in the direction of the anti-illusionistic Visistadvaita.

16. Hardy, *Viraha-bhakti*, 541.

17. E.g., F. J. Meier, "Der Archaismus in der Sprache des *Bhagavata-Purana," Zeitschrift für Indologie und Iranistik* 8 (1931): 33-79; see also Hardy, *Viraha-bhakti*, 489-90; van Buitenen, "Archaism of the *Bhagavata-Purana*." T. S. Rukmani, *A Critical Study of the Bhagavata Purana (with special reference to bhakti*) (Chowkhamba Sanskrit Studies 77, Varanasi: 1970) offers an appendix containing a long list of the *Bhagavata*'s Vedisms.

18. See G. N. Reddy, "Purana Performance-A Case Study from Telugu," paper delivered at the Madison Purana conference.

19. Hardy, *Viraha-bhakti*, 491.

20. Van Buitenen, "Archaism of the *Bhagavata-Purana."*

21. Van Buitenen focuses on Pañcaratra, citing Yamuna's *Agamapramanya*; but, as Gail has shown (4-9), the teachings of the Pañcaratra, strictly speaking, are not represented in the *Bhagavata Purana*.

22. Cf. also W. G. Neevel, *Yamuna's Vedanta and Pañcaratra: Integrating the Classical and the Popular* (Missoula, Mo.: Scholar's Press, 1977).

23. See David Shulman, "The Dynamics of Sect Formation in Medieval South India," to appear (in German) in a volume on the "Axial-Age" civilizations edited by S. N. Eisenstadt.

24. *Vamana Purana* (Varanasi: All-India Kashiraj Trust, 1967) 58.2, 80; *Bhagavatapurana with the commentary of Sridhara* (Varanasi: Pandita Pustakalaya, Samvat 2013) 8.4.14.

25. For another Puranic version, see *Vamana Purana* 58.1-84.

26. E.g., *Periyalvar* 2.10.8; *Periyatirumoli* 3.8.2-3; cf. Hardy, *Virahabhakti*, 373 n. 1.



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27. See Joanna Gottfried Williams, *The Art of Gupta India, Empire and Province* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), p. 33 and plate 24; but as there is no sign of Visnu here, the carving may simply represent the motif of an elephant struggling with a serpent or crocodile.

28. Williams, *Art of Gupta India*, p. 134 and plate 205. The Gupta relief is copied, with a distinct change in spirit, on the Varaha Temple, also at Deogarh (eighth century?): Williams, *Art of Gupta India*, p. 179 and plate 268.

29. *Brahmavaivarta Purana*, Anandasrama Sanskrit Series no. 102 (Poona, 1935), 3.12.9-22. It is interesting that this Purana preserves the erotic theme present in the story as told in the *Bhagavata*: Visnu, seeing Parvati's distress after Sani had beheaded her son, went to look for another head for him; he found Gajendra, exhausted after making love, lying in the forest; Visnu cut off Gajendra's head and transferred it to Parvati's child and, moved by the piteous cries of Gajendra's mate, he cut off another elephant's head and attached it to Gajendra's body, thus bringing him back to life. Compare the discussion by Paul B. Courtright, *Ganesa: Lord of Obstacles, Lord of Beginnings* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 39-40.

30. K. V. Raman, *Sri Varadarajaswami TempleKanchi* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1975), 9; cf. *Kañcippuranam of Civañanacuvamikal* (Kancipuram: Tiruvalluvar centamilp patacalai, 1964), 9.1-34. In the latter Saiva rendering of the story, Gajendra enters the crocodile's pond to bring flowers to his master, Visnu, for offering to Siva. In other respects, Civañanacuvmikal's version is remarkably close to the main features of the *Bhagavata*.

31. Timmavajjhala Kodandaramaiah, *The Telugu Poets of Madura and Tanjore* (Hyderabad: Andhra Pradesh Sahitya

Akademi, 1975), appendix 4.

32. See *Periya puranam* of Cekkilar (Tirunelveli: South India Saiva Siddhanta Works, 1970), 4232-42; Cuntaramurttinayanar, *Tevaram* (Tarumapuram: Tarumaiyatinam, 1964), *patikam* 92, vol. 4 (but see remarks on this *patikam* in my translation of the *Cuntarar Tevaram: Songs of the Harsh Devotee* (Philadelphia: Department of South Asia Regional Studies, University of Pennsylvania, 1990). And compare MBh 1.123.68ff.

33. Compare *Kuriñcippattu* 61-95; Cuntaramurtti, *Tevaram, patikam* 12; K. Zvelebil, *The Smile of Murugan* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973), 58 n. 1.

34. On this key term in the Srivaisnava tradition, see Robert C. Lester, "Ramanuja and Sri-Vaisnavism: The Concept of Prapatti or Saranagati," *History of Religions* 5 (1966), 266-82.

35. Hardy, *Viraha-bhakti*, 25-29, 36-38.





36. Dasgupta, *History of Indian Philosophy*, 33; see n. 15 above.

37. Compare the opening verse of the *Bhagavata*, discussed by Gail, 19.

38. Hardy, *Viraha-bhakti* 637, cites this as evidence of the *Bhagavata*'s Tamil provenance.

39. Compare the emphasis on memory as the form of yogic meditation in Ramanuja and his successors: Robert C. Lester, *Ramanuja on the Yoga* (Adyar, Madras: Adyar Library and Research Centre, 1976), 135.

40. Velcheru Narayana Rao, personal communication.

41. Verse numbers refer to the consecutive numbering of *Bhagavata Purana, skandha* 8, in the edition cited above (which also, however, retains the Sanskrit adhyaya division).

42. See D. Shulman, "The Scent of Memory in Hindu South India," *Anthropology of Aesthetics* 3 (1987), pp. 123-33.

43. These statements, by inverting conventional comparisons (the woman's thigh to elephant's trunk, etc.), exemplify the figure *vyatireka*.

44. *Narrinai* 202. Note that the *venkai* (kino tree) is homonymous with *venkai*, "tiger."

45. Compare *Kalittokai* 11; discussed in D. Shulman, "The Crossing of the Wilderness: Landscape and Myth in the Tamil Story of Rama," *Acta Orientalia* 42 (1981), 26-27.

46. On *akam* poetics, see the afterword in A. K. Ramanujan, *Poems of Love and War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 231-97.

47. The root recurs in participial form in the phrase cited from 65, **padakrantanirvakramai*. On *trivikrama*, see F. B. J. Kuiper, "The Three Strides of Visnu," in *Indological Studies in Honor of W. Norman Brown*, ed. E. Bender (New Haven, 1962), 137-51.

48. Cf. D. Shulman, "Divine Order and Divine Evil in the Tamil Tale of Rama," *Journal of Asian Studies* 38 (1979): 651-69.

49. A recorded *harikatha* version of our story (by Veeragandham Venkata Subba Rao, *Gajendra Moksham* [Oriental Records, n.p. 1980]) takes this colloquial soliloquy still farther: Gajendra asks himself, "The Lord where is he? What's he like? I don't know what form he has, or his name, or what village he lives in."

50. The critical edition reads *kamalapta*, "beloved of Kamala/Sri," which amounts to the same thing. We note in passing that the version of *Vamana Purana* 58 explicitly identifies Visnu as the addressee of the *stotra* throughout.

51. Chaganti Sesayya, *Sri Andhrakavitarangini*, vol. 6 (Kapilesvarapuramu, n.d.), 220 (my thanks to V. Narayana Rao for this refer-

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ence). The author aptly remarks, "The remaining verses truly appear to have been composed by God."

52. I owe this term to Dmitri Segal.

53. *Mahabhagavatamu* 7.80-384.

54. v. 1. *garinula maralan*, which reverses the direction of the caress. The verb *nivuru* is shared with v. 39 (see above).

55. See Margaret Egnor, "On the Meaning of Sakti to Women in Tamil Nadu," in *The Powers of Tamil Women*, ed. Susan S. Wadley (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1980), 19-20.

56. One thinks, perhaps, of Mandelstam's attractive and idiosyncratic notion of Hellenism as "the conscious surrounding of man with domestic utensils, and the humanizing and warming of the surrounding world with the most delicate teleological warmth." Osip Mandelstam, "On the Nature of the Word," in *Modern Russian Poets on Poetry*, ed. Carl Proffer (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1976), 45. (But in South India the appropriate thermal metaphor would be cooling rather than warmth.)

57. A. K. Ramanujan, "Two Realms of Kannada Folklore," in *Another Harmony: New Essays on the Folklore of India*, ed. Stuart H. Blackburn and A. K. Ramanujan (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), 64-67; Stuart H. Blackburn, "Domesticating the Cosmos: History and Structure in a Folktale from India," *Journal of Asian Studies* 45 (1986), 527-43.

58. Ramanujan, "Two Realms of Kannada Folklore," 41-55.

59. Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (New York: Anchor Books, 1957).

60. Tiruñanacampantar, *Tevaram* (Tarumapuram: Tarumaiyatinam, 1954), 2.98.9.

61. Hardy, op. cit., pp. 308-371.

62. Cf. ibid., pp. 520-22. The Bengal Vaisnavas venerate this passage, based on the experience of separation, as an example of ecstatic love, superior to *moksa*, in the *mahanubhava* stage. See the note by Ganesh Vasudeo Tagare in his translation of the *Bhagavata* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1979), 4:1540.

63. See the translation with introductory study by Velcheru Narayana Rao, *Siva's Warriors* (Princeton University Press, 1990).

64. *Basavapuranamu* of Palkuriki Somanatha (Madras: Vavilla Ramasvamisastrulu and Sons, 1952), 3 (pp. 151-60).

65. *Periya Puranam* of Cekkilar, 3664-3702.

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66. For a survey of the literature, see R. V. Ramakoti Sastry, "Telugu Versions of the Puranas," *Purana* 4 (1962), pp. 384-407. The features that have emerged from the above discussion are also applicable, with some important distinctions, to the large Nayak-period literature of Tamil Puranas, as I hope to show in a separate essay.

67. Compare the remarks by Don Handelman on a major Tamil Purana, probably slightly later than Potana: "The *Kantapuranam* may be thought of as a dialogue, or multilogue, between various points of view, some opposed and some shading into one another, and of the consequences for cosmic order of their implementation. The text explicates alternative positions and the reasoning that underlies them. Although the text is slanted strongly toward the validity of the position it espouses, it still brings such order into question, and pursues its contradictions until their confluence or eradication." D. Handelman, "Myths of Murugan: Asymmetry and Hierarchy in a South-Indian Puranic Cosmology," *History of Religions* 27 (1987), p. 170. This process is, however, greatly moderated in Potana, under the constraining impact of his Sanskrit model.

68. Cf. Pocock, op. cit., pp. 10-15.

Chapter 7

I would like here to express my gratitude to the British Academy for two grants that allowed me in 1982 and 1988 to travel extensively in South India and visit many Srivaisnava temples.

1. J. Wicki, ed., *Tratado do Pe. Gonçalo Fernandes Trancoso sobre o Hinduísmo (Maduré 1616*) (Lisbon: Centro de Estudos Históricos Ultramarinos, 1973), 155.

2. Wicki, *Tratado do Pe. Gonçalo Fernandes Trancoso*, 159: "Até aqui dos *pranas* de Juden."

3. Wicki, *Tratado do Pe. Gonçalo Fernandes Trancoso*, 160: "Bramanta-puranão."

4. He adds in chapter 30 what "Manu, son of Brahma," has to say about it (Wicki, *Tratado do Pe. Gonçalo Fernandes Trancoso*, 167-74) and, in Chapter 31, an account said to be from an "Aranyaka of the Yajurveda" (Wicki, *Tratado do Pe. Gonçalo Fernandes Trancoso*, 175-82).

5. Wicki, *Tratado do Pe. Gonçalo Fernandes Trancoso*, 155f. The original has *iruxi* (for *rsi*), *Viasen* (for Vyasa) and *Romacuruguen*. For "sacrifice" we find *equiam*, which is Tamil *ekkiyam*, from Sanskrit *yajña*.

6. Wicki, *Tratado do Pe. Gonçalo Fernandes Trancoso*, 157. Vexnu, Urutiren (for Rudra).





7. Wicki, *Tratado do Pe. Gonçalo Fernandes Trancoso*, 157.

8. J. A. Dubois, *Hindu Manners, Customs, and Ceremonies*, 3d ed. (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1906), 109.

9. Dubois, *Hindu Manners*, 542-45.

10. Dubois, *Hindu Manners*, 543.

11. J. Rösel, *Der Palast des Herrn des Welt: Entstehungsgeschíchte und Organisation der indischen Tempel- und Pilgerstadt Puri* (Munich, 1980), 215f.

12. Rösel, *Palast der Herrn der Welt*, 216.

13. Similarly also T. B. Coburn, *Devi-mahatmya: The Crystallization of the Goddess Tradition* (Delhi, 1984), 48, speaks of the *Puranas'* "dynamic quality, for they are a process." Even when looking "merely" at the texts, this dynamism is apparent. Compare, for example, the evolution of the *Brahmanda* and *Vayu Puranas* from a common archetype (see W. Kirfel, *Das Purana Pañcalaksana: Versuch einer Textgeschichte* (Bonn, 1927), x-xviii) or the story of Krsna in the parallel recensions of the *Brahma* and *Visnu Puranas* (see F. Hardy, *Viraha-bhakti: The Early History of Krsna Devotion in South India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), 86-91), or the influence of the *Bhagavata Purana* on the *Devibhagavata Purana* and the *Mahabhagavata Purana*.

14. See, for example, chapter 12 of the *Devimahatmya* where the recitation of the text itself is recommended as profitable religious act; compare L. Babb, *The Divine Hierarchy: Popular Hinduism in Central India* (New York, Columbia University Press 1975), (33-43, 218f) for a modern ritualized use of the same text. Or see the *Siva-Purana-Mahatmya* (derived from the *Skanda Purana*), chapters 3 to 6, on ritual details for the recitation of this work and on the rewards arising from it (Shastri, trans. *Siva-Purana*, [Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass 1970], vol. 1, 9-30). This aspect of the "oral puranic tradition" (viz., the ritualised recitation of, and improvisation on, a textually fixed Purana) will be ignored here.

15. For useful discussions of method with regards to the study of the Puranas see, for example, M. Biardeau, "Some Considerations About Textual Criticism," *Purana* 10 (1968), C. M. Brown, *God as Mother: A Feminine Theology in India* (Hartford, Vt., 1974), 12-20, and, most detailed, Coburn, *Devi-mahatmya*, 19-50.

16. Further material of this kind has been discussed in F. Hardy, "Ideology and Cultural Contexts of the Srivaisnava Temple," *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 14, no. 1 (1977): 119-51; F. Hardy, "The Tamil Veda of a *Sudra* Saint: The Srivaisnava Interpretation of Nammalvar," in *Contributions to South Asian Studies*, ed. Gopal Krishna, vol. 1 (Delhi, 1978), 29-87; F. Hardy, review of *Tamil Temple Myths*, by D. D. Shulman," *JRAS* 1982, no. 2: 201ff.

17. "Historicity" appears as a problem in Biardeau, "Considerations about Textual Criticism."

18. See *Devimahatmya*, chap. 1.60.

19. *Kahakosu*, *sandhi* 39.11-16.

20. *Kahakosu*, *sandhi* 35.1-3.

21. *Kahakosu*, *sandhi* 48.15-21.

22. *Kahakosu*, *sandhi* 48, 17, 12.

23. *Kahakosu*, *sandhi* 20, 5.

24. *Kahakosu*, *sandhi* 21, 11.

25. *Brhatkathakosa*, no. 136.

26. *Karakandacariü*, *sandhi* 5. The editor offers in his introduction (pp. 56-60) a description of the actual cave-temple complex near the modern village Tera in the Osmanabad district of Maharastra.

27. For details see Rahula, Bhikkhu Telwatte: *A Critical Study of the Mahavastu*, (Delhi, 1978), 100-106.

28. See Rahula, *Bhikkhu Telwatte*, 108ff.

29. The final verses of the *Devimahatmya*.

30. *Bilvaranyaksetra-mahatmyam*, 5.59f.

31. This reference to King Vairamegha may be a historical resonance; for a king of that name is actually mentioned in one of the poems by TiruMankai-Alvar. See Hardy, *Viraha-bhakti*, 264f.

32. Further details on this mythology will be found in F. Hardy, "The Srivaisnava Hagiography of Parkala," in *Indian Narrative Literature*, ed. C. Shackle and R. Snell (forthcoming).

33. *Kahakosu*, *sandhi* 38.1-15.

34. *Kahakosu*, *sandhi* 38.5.9.

35. *Kahakosu*, *sandhi* 13.4.

36. *Kahakosu*, *sandhi* 15.1f.

37. *Kahakosu*, *sandhi* 15.3-10.

38. Details can be found in Padmanabh S. Jaini, *The Jaina Path of Purification* (Delhi, 1979), 288-304.

39. For further references to this Rsabha avatar see, e.g., *Ce-tamalaippatirruppatt' Antati* v. 87.





40. See Hardy, *Viraha-bhakti*, 511-26, 647-52.

41. See Hardy, *Viraha-bhakti*, 542-47.

42. *Bhagavata Purana* 10.33.17. Compare Hardy, *Viraha-bhakti*, 538-41.

43. Hardy, *Viraha-bhakti*, e.g., 445.

44. *Brhaddharma Purana* 1.22.11.

45. *Brhaddharma Purana* 1.22.14f.

46. *Brhaddharma Purana* 1.17-22. For a similar story, with identical motivation, see the *Mahabhagavata Purana*, chap. 36-48 (also summarized in R. C. Hazra, *Studies in the Upapuranas*, vol. 2, *Sakta and Non-sectarian* [Calcutta, 1963], 265ff).

47. See Maity, *Historical Studies in the Cult of Manasa: A Socio-Cultural Study* (Calcutta, 1966), 300-302.

48. For a partial translation of one Bengali version see E. C. Dimock, trans., *The Thief of Love: Bengali Tales from Court and Village* (Chicago, 1963), 197-294.

49. W. L. Smith *The One-eyed Goddess: A Study of the Manasa Mangal* (Stockholm, 1980), 49.

50. Smith, *One-eyed Goddess*, 51.

51. Smith, *One-eyed Goddess*, 47f, 52ff.

52. *Devibhagavata Purana* 9.48; *Brahmavaivarta Purana, Prakrti-khanda* 46. Compare Maity, *Historical Studies*, 129f and Smith, *One-eyed Goddess*, 15ff.

53. Smith, *One-eyed Goddess*, 15.

54. The relevant poems are Sarojini Babar (ed.), *Ek hota raja*, pt. 1, *Yallamma-devici gani* (N.p. 1965), nos. 1, 4 and 7.

55. Babar, *Ek hota raja*, no. 8, verse 7. No. 3 mentions that the son was a miraculous gift from Sambha (=Siva).

56. Babar, *Ek hota raja*, nos. 2 and 5.

57. See G.-D. Sontheimer, *Biroba, Mhaskoba und Khandoba: Ursprung, Geschichte und Umwelt von pastoralen Gottheiten in Maharastra* (Wiesbaden, 1976), 55-58.

58. Babar, *Ek hota raja*, no. 6, verses 3f.

59. See *Devikatha*, pp. 16-21. Sontheimer, *Biroba, Mhaskoba und Khandoba* is a detailed general study of the processes leading from "folk religion" to textual puranic forms in Maharastra.



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60. See Hardy, "Ideology and Cultural Contexts of the Srivaisnava Temple," *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 14, no. 1 (1977): 147f.

61. See F. Hardy, "Madhavendra Puri: A Link between Bengal Vaisnavism and South Indian *Bhakti," JRAS* 1974, no. 1: 36.

62. See, e.g., *JRAS* 1985, no. 1: 23-28. Höfer, an anthropologist of Nepal, replies here to a review by the Tibetologist Skorupski (in *JRAS* 1982, no. 2: 205ff). In his reply Höfer justifies his translation of words used in the Tamang language according to meanings provided by his own informants. Skorupski on the other hand had suggested that such meanings ought to be discarded in favor of classical, viz., textual Tibetan definitions.

63. See *Kañcimahatmyam* and compare Marie-Claude Porcher, "La représentation de l'espace sacré dans le *Kañcimahatmya," Purusartha* 8 (1985): 23-50.

64. *Devikatha*, pp. 7-11.

65. Thus the version of the Mahisa episode, in *Devikatha*, pp. 7-11, states that Siva emitted fire from his eyes that turned into the goddessa definite Saivite twist to the intention of the *Devimahatmya*.

66. See in particular chapters 61 to 63, in K. R. van Kooij, *Worship of the Goddess according to the* Kalikapurana, pt. 1 (Leiden, 1972).

67. The Purana tells a long love-story which explains how the Goddess settled in Benares. See 3.14-25.

68. The evidence is not very strong, but at least it might point us into a more definite direction. The figure of Dattatreya has enjoyed enormous popularity in Maharastra, and the long section on him in the *Markandeya Purana* (16.37-44) is almost the only classical text on him. The *sthalapurana* of Kolhapur in Southern Maharastra claims (see *Devikatha*, pp. 7-11) that the killing of Mahisa took place therecould this be connected with the mysterious Kolas mentioned at the beginning of the *Devimahatmya ?*

69. This issue would require a more detailed and technical discussion. Here I may just mention two considerations. Venkatanatha (thirteenth to fourteenth century) refers to the "*Brahmanda Purana*" as the source of the story about Brahma's sacrifice in Kancipuram. Thus at least the *sthalapurana* of that temple must have been accepted by that date as established. The *sthalapurana* of TirukKurunkuti mentions an encounter in a forest between a Brahmin, a demon and Visnu in the guise of a boy. From the thirteenth century a *Kaisika Purana* is textually established (which serves as the basis for an annual drama-event in the same temple that is performed even today). Here however the demon threatens an Untouchable. Given the existence of the annual ritual in the temple, it seems very unlikely that the *sthalapurana* could have been written *after* the introduction of





the *Kaisika Purana*. Since a number of Vaisnava *sthalapuranas* mention the Alvars, it seems plausible to assume that this marks their *terminus a quo*. Nevertheless in cases where the temple itself is older, one could argue that these hagiographic passages are later additions.

70. W. Kirfel, *Das Purana Pañcalaksana: Versuch einer Textgeschichte* (Bonn, 1927); W. Kirfel, *Das Purana vom Weltgebäude* (*Bhuvanavinyasa*)*Die kosmographischen Traktate der Purana's: Versuch einer Textgeschichte* (Bonn, 1954).

71. Kirfel himself (1926) applied this direction of study to the figure of Krsna; this was developed further by Hardy, *Viraha-bhakti*. Hacker focused on the figure of Prahlada to establish a tentative "history of ideas" of medieval theistic Hinduism. P. Hacker, *Prahlada: Werden und Wandlungen einer IdealgestaltBeiträge zur Geschichte des Hinduismus*, 2 vols. Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur, Abhandlungen der Geistes- und Sozialwissen-schaftlichen Klasse, no. 9. Wiesbaden, 1959.

72. Thus in the *Harivamsa*, history with its royal *vamsas* is presented as culminating in Krsna; see Hardy, *Viraha-bhakti*, 67ff.

73. See Kirfel, *Purana vom Weltgebäude*, 47f.

74. See note 38 above.

75. The life story of Nammalvar as narrated in the *sthalapurana* of Alvar-TiruNakari differs in many important respects from that found in *sampradayika* works of the Srivaisnavas (for details see Hardy, "Tamil Veda of a Sudra Saint," 56-61). Similarly the hagiography of Parakala or TiruMankai-Alvar found in the Purana of his hometown TiruNakari presents a very different person, and reads a very different message out of his life, compared with traditions more centrally connected with Srivaisnavism. Details will be found in Hardy, "Srivaisnava Hagiography of Parakala."

76. For details see Hardy, "Tamil Veda of a *Sudra* Saint," 55f.

77. For details see F. Hardy, "The Philosopher as Poet: A Study of Vedantadesika's *Dehalisastuti," Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 7 (1979): 288f.

78. My review of Shulman, *Tamil Temple Myths* (F. Hardy, review of *Tamil Temple Myths* by D. D. Shulman, *JRAS* 1982, no. 2: 201ff.) was published in a truncated form. Originally it contained a final section in which I summarized the *Tañja-mahatmya* to demonstrate such differences between the Vaisnava and Saiva *sthalapurana* traditions. "The Vaisnava works share a considerable amount of the mythical idiom [analyzed by Shulman], but use it for a different ideological and theological purpose."

79. Quoted from one of the brochures of the festival. Also the description of various "tableaux" given below derives from such a brochure.

Chapter 8

In an earlier form, this article was written for the Pro-Seminar on the Puranas at the University of Wisconsin under David Knipe and V. Narayana Rao in 1981. It was extensively revised for publication after I participated in the Conference on the Puranas at the University of Wisconsin in August 1985, and after fieldwork on the contemporary Svetambara Murtipujaka Jainas of Gujarat from August 1985 through April 1987. Fieldwork was carried under a Fulbright-Hays Dissertation Grant.

1. For the problematic nature of the Western scholarly understanding of the Jaina "canon," see Folkert 1975:43-56 and 1989.

2. This preserved section is the S*atkhandagama* of Puspadanta and Bhutabali.

3. J. C. Jain (1984: 34-38) argues that the *Drstivada* contained a catalogue of heretical, i.e., non-Jaina, perspectives on various philosophical matters. The safest comment on the *Drstivada* is probably that of Ludwig Alsdorf (1973: 5), who describes a "firmly established if somewhat naive belief that 'the Drstivada contains *everything*'a belief obviously betraying complete ignorance of the real contents of the long-lost text and, on the other hand, conveniently permitting to derive from 'the Drstivada' . . . any text or subject which it is desired to invest with canonical dignity." For a review of the scholarly literature concerning the contents of the *Drstivada*, see Folkert 1975: 80-81 n. 1.

4. In this context I do not find it helpful to distinguish between the genres of biography and hagiography, and so characterize the Jaina Puranas as biographies.

5. See Weber 1858 and 1901.

6. See J. C. Jain 1970, 1977, and 1981. For examples of texts, see *Brhatkathakosa*, *Kahakosu*, *Kathakosa*, and *Vasudevahindi*. For a modern example of this genre, see Mahendra Kumarji 1984.

7. The other two are *samyagdarsana* (correct faith) and *samyagjnana* (correct knowledge), to which are often added *samyaktapas* (correct penance).

8. The authenticity of this text is denied by the Digambaras, as well as the Svetambara sects of the Sthanakavasis and Terapanthis.

9. See appendix 2 for a list of all twenty-four Tirthankaras of the current cycle of time.

10. See Fischer and Jain 1978 for a length discussion of the *kalyanakas* in Jaina literature, art, and ritual.

11. See Bloomfield 1919 for a detailed English synopsis of a Jinacaritra, the Sanskrit *Parsvanatha Caritra* of the Svetambara Bhavadevasuri, composed in 1256 C.E. in Gujarat.





12. On the different subtraditions within the Jaina Ramayanas, see V. M. Kulkarni 1959-60, 1962, and 1990; and U. P. Shah 1983.

13. For an English summary of the story as told by Vimalasuri, see Chandra 1970: 18-32.

14. See K. R. Chandra 1970: 4-9.

15. See K. R. Chandra 1964.

16. See, for example, Winternitz 1933: 489-90 and Jha 1978: 17-18.

17. This argument is also made by P. S. Jaini in this volume.

18. There are Ramayanas at the earliest levels of Jaina writings in several other languages. For Ravisena's *Padma Purana*, the first Jaina Sanskrit Purana, composed in 676 C.E., see Premi 1956: 87-108. The popularity of this theme for later authors can be seen in that there were at least thirteen more Jaina tellings of the Rama story in Sanskrit alone (Caudhari 1973: 42-

43).

The oldest extant Jaina Purana in Apabhramsa, the *Paümacariu* of Svayambhu, is also a telling of the Rama story. Unlike most Jaina authors, Svayambhu was a householder, not a mendicant. He lived sometime between the early eighth and early ninth centuries C.E., probably in Karnataka (Premi 1956: 209-11; J. P. Jain 1964: 201-2).

There is also an important Kannada version of the Rama Caritra, by Nagacandra, more generally known as Abhinava Pampa (New Pampa). He was a court poet of the Visnuvardhana, the great Hoysala emperor who reigned from 1104 to 1141 C.E. His most famous work is the *Ramacandra Caritra Purana*, more widely known as the *Pampa Ramayana*. It is closely based on the *Paümacariya* of Vimalasuri.

19. For a detailed summary and discussion of Punnata Jinasena's eighth-century C.E. Sanskrit *Harivamsa Purana*, see P. S. Jaini in this volume. See also Warder 1972-83: 4.463-66. For a summary of the story of Krsna as contained in Puspadanta's tenth-century C.E. Apabhramsa *Mahapuranu*, see the introduction by the editor, P. L. Vaidya (vol. 3, pp. xxv-xxxi). For a German translation of part of the latter, see Alsdorf's 1936 edition.

20. For a short discussion of Jaina versions of one genre of child Krsna stories, see Hawley 1983: 27-29.

21. On the Pandava Puranas, see Caudari 1973: 52-55; H. Jain 1962: 166; P. S. Jaini 1984; and D. P. Mishra 1983-83: 43-44. See also *Panda-vacarita* of Devaprabha, *Pandava Purana* of Subhacandra, and *Pandava Purana* of Vadicandra.

22. Kannada was the most important of the vernacular languages for Jaina Puranic composition, and in turn Jaina authors were instrumental in the development of Kannada as a literary language. The "Three Gems" of





Kannada literature, Pampa, Ponna, and Ranna, were all Jainas who wrote less than a century after the great Karnataka Sanskrit author Jinasena. But whereas Jinasena and his disciple Gunabhadra were both mendicants, the Kannada authors were householders. The development of Jaina literature in the vernacular seems to have been a process similar to the development of Hindu literature in vernaculars such as Bengali, Hindi, Oriya, and Telugu. In both cases, educated laity wrote in a language accessible to the broader populace, in reaction to the elite, nonmother languages used by the religious professionals.

23. Gunavarma's *Neminatha Purana* (also known as the *Harivamsa Purana*) is the earliest known Jaina Purana in Kannada, but it is no longer extant. Gunavarma was an author in the court of Ereyappa, the Ganga king who reigned from 886 to 913 C.E.. See Rice 1921: 30.

24. Pampa came from a family of Brahmins that had converted to Jainism one generation previously. He was both a court poet and a general under the Calukya Arikesari, a tributary ruler of the Gangas in the mid-tenth century C.E. His most famous work is the *Vikramarjunavijaya*, more popularly known as the *Pampa Bharata*, in which he retells the Jaina *Mahabharata*. See Rice 1921: 30-31.

25. See Bruhn 1954 and 1961.

26. The Digambara Jainas of the Karnataka region used Sanskrit in their writings probably from the time of the earliest penetrations of Jainism into the area in the early centuries of the Common Era. For parts of Karnataka, Jainism was the vehicle by which the North Indian Brahminic Sanskrit tradition was introduced. Jaina mendicants and laity were influential in the courts of the Ganga, Rastrakuta, and Hoysala dynasties. Many of these royalty were strong patrons of the Jainas, and occasionally Jaina themselves. For several centuries Jainism and culture were nearly synonymous. The seventh through tenth centuries C.E. saw the flourishing of a Jaina Sanskrit literature, and Jaina Puranas were some of the more important works composed. The *Adi Purana* was also popular among the medieval Digambaras of North India and western India. Saryu Doshi (1985: 85102) has published and analyzed illustrations from five illustrated manuscripts of the *Adi Purana* from Jaipur and Delhi, dated from ca. 1420 C.E. to 1606 C.E.

27. The best source on Hemacandra remains Bühler 1936, but a fuller study is needed. See also Jacobi 1914 and Sharma 1975, and the special issue of *Jain Journal* (2, no. 4 [1968]) devoted to Hemacandra.

28. On this, see P. S. Jaini 1976.

29. For a list of twenty-eight Mahapuranas from the tenth to eighteenth centuries, see D. P. Mishra 1982-83: 44-45.

30. sthitih kuladharotpattirvamsanamatha nirgamah/
puroh samrajyamarhantyam nirvanam yugavicchida//





ete mahadhikarah syuh purane vrsabhesinah/
yathavasaramanyesu puranesvapi laksayet//
(Jinasena, *Adipurana* II.158-59)

31. sa ca dharmah puranarthah puranam pañcadhah viduh/
ksetram kalasca tirthañca satpumsastadvicestitam//
(Jinasena, *Adipurana* II.38)

32. ksetram trailokyavinyasah kalastraikalyavistarah/
muktyupayo bhavettirtham purusastannisevinah//
nyayyamacaritam tesam caritam duritacchidam/
iti krtsnah puranarthah prasne sambhavitastvaya//
(Jinasena, *Adipurana* II.39-40)

33. The earlier Digambara Punnata Jinasena in his eighth-century C.E. *Harivamsa Purana* (1.55a) seems to refer to a similar fivefold definition, when he mentions the fivefold "ends" or "meanings" (*artha*) of a Purana as "*ksetra*, etc." (*pañcadhapravibhaktartham ksetradipravibhagatah*). The use of "etc." (*adi*) indicates that Punnata Jinasena was referring to a well-known formula, which he does not feel necessary to spell out.

In a Digambara cosmographical text, the Sanskrit *Lokavibhaga* of Simhasurarsi, there is a similar fivefold definition of a Purana as consisting of *ksetra, kala, tirtha, mahatta* (the greatness of the Jaina heroes), and *carita* (their deeds). While the *Lokavibhaga* was written after the times of both Jinasenas, it claims to be the Sanskrit translation of a lost fourth-century C.E. Prakrit text written by Sarvanandi. This fivefold definition may have been in Sarvanandi's text, but considering the looseness of the notion of faithfulness to the original in Indian translations, and the tendency to increase a text's authority by claiming that it contains all or part of an earlier text, this definition may have been added (or an earlier definition changed) by Simhasurarsi. But regardless of the antiquity of this definition, it does not seem to have caught on explicitly, for it is not used by the many later authors of Jaina Puranas.

34. loko desah puram rajyam tirtham danatapo'nvayam/
puranesvastadhakhyeyam gatayah phalamityapi//
(Jinasena, *Adipurana* IV.3)

35. puranamitihasakhyam yatprovaca ganadhipah/
(Jinasena, *Adipurana* I.26b)

36. One finds similar tables of contents in other Jaina Puranas. See, for example: Vimalasuri, *Paümacariya* 1.32; Ravisena, *Padma Purana* 1.43-44; and Punnata Jinasena, *Harivamsa Purana* 1.71-72.

37. . . . arahanta va cakkavatti va baladeva va vasudeva va . . .
(*Kappa Sutta* 17)
See also *Kappa Sutta* 18, 21-22.

38. See A. K. Warder 1972-83: 2.221.





39. This text seems to have suffered excessively from later interpolations, and different manuscripts are of widely different lengths (see the introduction by the Sthanakavasi editor Mini Kanhaiyalal to his 1966 edition of the text, page *na)*. The different lists may either or both be additions. For the description of the sixty-three *salaka purusas*, see vv. 246-75, Hiralal Jain 1962: 128, and G. C. Caudari 1973: 67; for fifty-four *salaka purusas*, see vv. 54 and 132.

40. This Sauraseni Prakrit text is believed by the Digambaras to contain the only extant portion of the lost *Drstivada*. Padmanabh Jaini (1979: 50) dates the writing down of the text to the second century C.E., and it probably represents a fairly faithful oral transmission from the earliest days of the Jainas. *Sutra* 1.1.2 (p. 113) of the S*atkhandagama* states that the *prathamanuyoga* of the *Drstivada*, also known as the *Purana*, contained 5,000 verses (padamaniyogo pañcasahassapadehi 5000 puranam vannedi). According to verses 77-80 of the *Dhavalatika* commentary on the S*atkhandagama*, written around 800 C.E. by Jinasena's teacher Virasena, these 5,000 verses describe the twelve lineages, those of the Tirthankaras, Cakravartins, Vidyadharas, Vasudevas, Caranas, Prajñasramanas, Kurus, Haris, Iksvakus, Kasyapas, Vadis, and Nathas. The Tirthankaras, Cakravartins, and Vasudevas constitute forty-five of the *salaka purusas*. The Vidyadharas might well here refer to the nine Baladevas, and possibly also the nine Prati-vasudevas, in which case the list would include the whole of the fifty-four or sixty-three *salaka purusas*.

41. The best treatment of the Nayanars is Peterson 1989. Indira Peterson does not, however, discuss the genesis of the number sixty-three.

42. . . . etto salayapurisa tesatthi . . .
(Yativrsabha, *Tiloya Pannatti* 4.510)

43. jinaih saha trisastih syuh salakapurusa ami/ (jinairrabhad-ibhiscaturvimsatya sardhamami dvadasa cakravartinah nava vasudevah nava baladevah nava prativasudevasceti trisastih salakabhutah purusesu jatarekha ityarthah) (Hemacandra, *Abhidhanacintamani* 3.364a and *Svopajñavrtti)*

44. For a detailed discussion of the Arhat-Cakravartin relationship in the Buddhist tradition, see Tambiah 1976.

45. According to the Svetambara tradition she sees fourteen dreams, while according to the Digambara tradition she sees sixteen.

46. According to the Svetambaras, these are: elephant, bull, lion, Gajalaksmi, garland, moon, sun, banner, full pot, lotus lake, ship, heavenly vehicle, heap of jewels, and flame (see *Kappa Sutta* 34-47). The Digambaras add a throne and a pair of fish.

47. Lion, sun, fire, elephant, banner, heavenly vehicle, and lotus lake.



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48. Elephant, ocean, lion, and moon.

49. The material in this section is based on fieldwork in Gujarat among the Svetambara Murtipujaka Jainas, and the comments are applicable only to this sect, not the other three. For another description of a Jaina sermon, see Cort 1989: 312-13.

50. It is a matter of custom (*maryada*) in the Tapagaccha, the major *gaccha* (subdivision) of the Murtipujakas, that *sadhvis* do not give sermons. This restriction does not apply to the other *gacchas* of the Murtipujakas (Kharatara, Añcala, Vimala) or to the Sthanakavasi or Terapanthi sects.

51. For printed examples of modern tellings of these stories, see Candrasekharvijay Gani 1977, 1985; Ramcandrasuri 1941.

52. See Doshi 1985.

## Chapter 9

1. For a brief survey of the Jaina Puranic literature, see M. Winternitz, *A History of Indian Literature*, vol. 2, trans. S. Ketkar and H. Kohn (University of Calcutta, 1933), section 4 479-520; Hiralal Jain, *Bharatiya samskritimeñ Jain dharma ka yogadan* (in Hindi) (Bhopal: Madhyapradesha Shasana Sahitya Parishad, 1962); Gulabchandra Chaudhari, *Jain Sahitya ka brhad itihas*, pt. 6, (in Hindi), Parshvanatha Vidyashrama Granthamala, vol. 20, (Varanasi, 1973), 35-128.

2. *Jaina Sutras*, translated from Prakrit by Hermann Jacobi, pt 1, (*Kalpa-Sutra*, pp. 217-311 [*Jinacarita*, pp. 217-85]), The Sacred Books of the East, vol. 22, 1884.

3. *Buddhavamsa and Cariyapitaka*, ed. N. A. Jayawickrama (London: Pali Text Society, 1968).

4. For a list of twenty-two *amsavataras*, see *Srimad-Bhagavata*, Gita Press Edition, vi, viii, 13-19.

5. For a scriptural description of the Cakravartins, see Jinendra Varni, *Jainendra-Siddhanta-Kosa*, 4 (Varanasi: Bharatiya Jnanapitha, 1944): 10-16.

6. See *Uttaradhyayana*, lecture 22, translated by Hermann Jacobi, in *Jaina Sutras*, pt 2, The Sacred Books of the East, vol. 45 (1895).

7. See R. C. Sharma, "Jaina Sculptures of the Gupta Age in the State Museum, Lucknow," in *Shri Mahavira Jaina Vidyalaya Golden Jubilee Volume*, (Bombay, 1968), 142-53; U. P. Shah, "Evolution of Jaina Iconography & Symbolism," *Aspects of Jaina Art and Architecture*, ed. U. P. Shah and M. A. Dhaky, (Ahmedabad, 1975), 49-74.





8. See *Jainendra-Siddhanta-Kosa*, 4, pp. 16-17.

9. See *Jainendra-Siddhanata-Kosa*, 4, pp. 18-20.

10. See *Jainendra-Siddhanta-Kosa*, 4, pp. 20-21.

11. anidanagada savve Baladeva Kesava nidanagada /
uddhamgami savve Baladeva Kesava adhogami //
*Tiloya-pannatti* 4.1436, quoted in the
*Jainendra-Siddhanta-Kosa* 4, p. 18.

12. kalahappiya kadayim dhammarada Vasudevasamakala /
bhavva nirayagadim te himsadosena gacchamti //
*Trilokasara* 835, quoted in the *Jainendra-Siddhanta-Kosa* 4, p. 22.

13. savve dasame puvve Rudda bhatta tavau visayattham /
sammattarayanarahida budda ghoresu nirayesum //
(*Tiloya-pannatti* 4.1442, quoted in the *Jainendra-Siddhanta-Kosa* 4, p. 22).

14. The inclusion of the Prati-vasudevas in the list of the *salaka purusas* has not escaped controversy. Silanka's (ca. 868) *Mahapurana*, for example, omits them from this list and hence is entitled *Caupanna-mahapurisa-cariya*. See Winternitz, *History of Indian Literature*, vol. 2, 506 n. 1.

15. *Paümacariya* of Vimalasuri, (Varanasi: Prakrit Grantha Parishad, 1962).

16. padmakara samutpanna prthivi saghanadruma /
tad asya lokapadmasya vistarena praksaitam //
*Vayu Purana*, adhyaya 45, quoted in Baladeva Upadhyaya,
*Purana-vimarsha* (in Hindi), (Varanasi, 1960).

17. siho maena nihao sanena ya kumjaro jaha bhaggo /
taha vivariyapayattham kaihi Ramayanam rahiyam //
aliyam pi savvam eyam uvavattiviruddhapaccayagunehim /
na ya saddahamti purisa havamti je pamdiya loe //
evam cimtamto cciya samsayapariharakaranam raya /
jinadarisanussuyamano gamanucchaho tao jao //
(*Paümacariya* 2.116-18)

18. For the Jaina versions of the Rama story, see Camille Bulche, *Ramakatha* (in Hindi) (Prayag, 1950).

19. Cf. Prthivisundarimukhyah Kesavasya [i.e., Laksmanasya] manoramah /
dvigunastasahasrani devyah satyo 'bhavan sriyah //

Sitadyastasahasrani Ramasya pranavallabhah / . . .
halayudham maharatnam Aparajitanamakam //
(*Uttara-Purana* 68.666-67, quoted in the
*Jainendra-Siddhanta-kosa*, 4, pp. 18-19).





20. *Padma-Carita* of Ravisena, 3 pts., (Varanasi: Bharatiya Jnanapitha, 1958-59).

21. *Paümacariu* of Svayambhu, ed. H. C. Bhayani 3 pts., (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidyabhavana, 1953 and 1960).

22. *Maha-Purana* of Puspadanta, ed. P. L. Vaidya 3 parts, (Bombay: Manikchandra Digambara Jaina Granthamala, 1937-47). See also sections 81-92 (pt. 3), entitled *Harivamsa-Purana*, in a German translation by L. Alsdorf, (Hamburg, 1936).

23. *Harivamsa-Purana* of [Punnata] Jinasena, edited with Hindi translation by Pannalal Jain (Varanasi: Bharatiya Jnanapitha, 1962).

24. *The Harivamsa*, ed. P. L. Vaidya (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1969), vol. 1.

25. kalesu jinavaranam cauvisanam havamti cauvisa /
te Bahubalippamuha kamdappa niruvamayara //
(*Tiloya-pannatti* 4.1472, quoted in the
*Jainendra-Siddhanta-kosa* 4, p. 22).

26. *Vasudevahindi*, ed. Muni Caturavijaya and Muni Punyavijaya, 2 pts. (Bhavanagara: Jaina Atmananda Sabha, 1930-31); J. C. Jain, *Vasudeva-Hindi: Authentic Jaina Version of Brhatkatha*: (Ahmedabad: L. D. Institute of Indology, 1977).

27. For a brief survey, see Padmanabh S. Jaini, "*Mahabharata* Motifs in the Jaina *Pandava-Purana*," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 47, no. 1 (1984), 108-15; Padmanabh S. Jaini, "Bhattaraka Sribhusana's *Pandava-Purana*: a case of Jaina sectarian plagiarism?," *Panels of the VIIIth World Sanskrit Conference*, vol. VI and VII (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991), pp. 59-68.

28. For a discussion on the goddess Ekanamsa in the Puranas, see Vinapani Pande, *Harivamsa Purana ka samskritika vivecana* (in Hindi) (Uttar Pradesh: Hindi Samiti Granthamala, Publication Division, 1960). On the possible identity of Ekanamsa with the Tamil goddess Pinnai (a sister as well as a lover of Krsna), see Dennis Hudson, "Pinnai, Krishna's Cowherd Wife," in *The Divine Consort*, ed. J. S. Hawley and D. M. Wulff (Berkeley: Berkeley Religious Studies Series, 1982), 256. Both accounts appear to be unfamiliar with the Jaina tradition discussed here.

29. tatas tvam grhya carane silayam nirasisyati /
nirasyamana gagane sthanam prapsyasi sasvatam // . . .
kirna bhutaganair ghorair man nidesanuvarttini /
kaumaram vratam asthaya tridivam tvam gamisyasi // . . .
tatraiva tvam bhaginyarthe grhisyati sa Vasavah /
Kusikasya tu gotrena Kausiki tvam bhavisyasi // . . .
sa te Vindhyanagasresthe sthanam dasyati sasvatam /
tatah sthanasahasrais tvam prthivim sobhayisyasi // . . .





krtanuyatra bhutais tvam nityam mamsabalipriya /
tithau navamyam pujam tvam prapsyase sapasukriyam //
(*Harivamsa, Visnuparva, adhyaya* 58)

30. Aryastavam pravaksyami yathoktam rsibhih pura /
Narayanim namasyami devim tribhuvanesvarim // . . .
(*Harivamsa*, *Visnuparva*, *adhyaya* 59.1)

31. (a) svasuh prasutim pratividya Kamsah prasutyagaram vighrnah pravisya /
vilokya balam amalam amusyah patih kadacit prabhaved arir me //
vicintya sankakulitas tadeti nirastakopo 'pi sa dirghadarsi /
svayam samadaya karena tasyah pranudya nasam cipiticakara //
(*Harivamsa Purana* 35.31-32)

(b) vasunibha Vasudevo Devaki catmajasya
prasamitaripuvahner viksya visrabdham asyam /
sukham atulam agatam Ekanasa ca kanya
bhuvi sutasahajanam samprayogah sukhaya //
(*Harivamsa Purana* 36.50)

(c) iti samaye prayati tu kadacid asau pranatair
upahasita prayadbhir avasad Balarajasutaih /
Vicipitanasikam rahasi darpanake svamukham
sphutam avalokya tadbhavaviragam agat trapita //
(*Harivamasa Purana* 49.13)

32. avitatham ity ami vitatham eva satha kavayah
svaparamaharayo vidadhate vikathakathanam /
paravadhakapathesu bhuvi tesu tatheti janah
suraravamudhadhih patati gaddarikakatavat // . . .
atinicitagnivayujalabhumilatatarubhih
ksitir apacetanais ca grhakalpitadaivatakaih /
ravividhutarakagrahaganair jananetrapathair
gaganam ato 'stu mudhir iha kasya janasya na va //
(*Harivamsa Purana* 49.37, 47)

33. See *Harivamsa Purana* 33.150-73.

34. Cf. akuñcya caranau pascat sarasarvabhisaratah/
lalambe Nemidohstambhe Krsnah kapir iva drume //
na ca Nemibhujastambhah sutramatram api kvacit /
sthanac cacala kim Meros culi calati vatyaya //
(*Pandava-Caritam* of Maladhari Devaprabha,
Kavyamala Series no. 93 [Bombay, 1911], 16.54-55)

35. Cf. paredyuhsamaye panijalasekasya Madhavah /
yiyasur durgatim lobhasutivranubhavodayat //
durasayah suradhisapujyasyapi mahatmanah /





svarajyadanam asankya Nemer mayavidam varah //
nirvedakaranam kincin niriksyaisa viramsyati /
bhogebhya iti samcintya tadupayavidhitsaya // . . .
vyadhadhipair dhrtanitam nanamrgakadambakam /
vidhayaikatra samkirnam vrtim tatparito vyadhat //
(*Uttara Purana* of Gunabhadra [Varanasi:
Bharatiya Jnanapitha, 1954]. 71.152-55)

36. See, for example, the story of Siha Senapati, *Vinaya-Pitaka*, vol. 1 (London: Pali Text Society, 1879-83), 233ff.

37. atha tav api samkruddhav udyamya Kurunandana /
erakamustiparighau carantau jaghnatur yudhi // . . .
Ramah samudravelayam yogam asthaya paurusam /
tatyaja lokam manusyam samyojyatmanam atmani //
Ramaniryanam alokya bhagavan Devakisutah /

nisasada dharopasthe tusnim asadya pippalam // . . .
musalavasesayahkhandakrtesur lubdhako Jara /
mrgasyakaram tac caranam vivyadha mrgasankaya //
(*Srimad Bhagavata* 11.30.23-33)
bhagavan pitamaham viksya vibhutir atmano vibhuh /
samyojyatmani catmanam padmanetre nyamilayat //
lokabhirmam svatanum dharanadhyanamangalam /
yogadharanaya "gneyya 'dagdhva dhamavisat svakam //
(*Srimad Bhagavata* 11.31.5-6)

38. punyodayat pura praptav unnatim yau janatigam /
cakradiratnasampannau balinau BalaKesavau //
punyaksayat tu tav eva ratnabandhuvivarjitau /
pranamatraparivarau sokabharavasikrtau //
prasthitau daksinam asam jivitasavalambinau /
ksutpipasaparisrantau yatau satkamksinau pathi // . . .
tasmin gate Haris tivravranavedanayarditah /
uttarabhimukho bhutva krtapañcanamaskrtih // . . .
karmagauravadosena maya 'pi na krtam tapah /
ityadisubhacintatma bhaviyat tirthakrdd Harih /
baddhayuskataya mrtva trtiyam prthivim itah //
(*Harivamsa Purana* 62.1-3, 58-63)

39. bhavisyat tirthakrdd Harih (*Harivamsa Purana* 62.62)

40. For a chart of the twenty-four future Tirthankaras, see *Jainendra-Siddhanta-Kosa*, 2, p. 376.

41. See "Tirthankara," *Jainendra-Siddhanta-Kosa*, 2, p. 372; P. S. Jaini, "Tirthankara-prakrti and the Bodhisattva Path," *Journal of the Pali Text Society* (London) 9 (1981): 96-104.

42. Pandavaih saha Jarasutanvitais Tungyabhikhyagirimastake tatah /





samvidhaya Haridehasamskriyam Jaraseyasuvitirnarajyakah //
(*Harivamsa Purana* 63.72)

43. jñatva bhagavatah siddhim pañca Pandavasadhavah /
Satruñjayagirau dhirah pratimayoginah sthitah //
sukladhyanasamavista BhimArjunaYudhisthirah /
krtva 'stavidhakarmantam moksam jagmus trayo 'ksayam //
(*Harivamsa Purana* 65.18-22)

44. ekam varsasatam krtva tapo Haladharo munih /
samaradhya pariprapto brahmaloke suresatam //
(*Harivamsa Purana* 65.33)

45. avadhijñataKrsnas ca gatva 'sau Valukaprabham /
drstva 'nujam nijam devo duhkhitam duhkhito 'bhavat //
ehy ehi Krsna yo 'ham te bhrata jyestho Halayudhah /
brahmalokadhipo bhutva tvatsamipam ihagatah //
ity uktva tam samuddhrtya svarlokam netum udyate /
deve tasya vyaliyanta gatrani navanitavat //
tatah Krsno jagau deva bhratah kim vyarthacestitaih /. ..
bhratar yahi tatah svargam bhunksva punyaphalam nijam /
ayuso 'nte 'ham apy emi moksahetum manusyatam //
avam tatra tapah krtva jinasasanasevaya /
moksasaukhyam avapsyavah krtva karmapariksayam //

(*Harivamsa Purana* 65.43-51)

46. avam putradisamyuktau mahavibhavasangatau /
Bharate darsayanyesam vismayavyaptacetasam //
sankhacakragadapanir madiyapratimagrhaih /
Bharatam vyapaya ksetram matkirtiparivrddhaye //
(*Harivamsa Purana* 65.52-53)

47. ityadi vacanam tasya pratipadya suresvarah /
samyaktve suddhim akhyapya Bharatam ksetram agatah //
bhratrsnehavaso devo yathoddita m sa Visnuna /
cakre divyavimanasthacakrilangaladarsanam //
Vasudevagrhais cakre nagaradinivesitaih /
Visnumohamayam lokam snehat kim va na cestyate //
(*Harivamsa Purana* 65.54-56)

48. Also: dhik dhik svarmoksasaukhyapratigham
atighanasnehamoham jananam //
(*Harivamsa Purana* 65.58d.)

49. *Adi-Purana* of Jinasena, edited with Hindi translation by Pannalal Jain, 2 pts. Varanasi: Bharatiya Jnanapith, 1944.

50. *Uttara-Purana* of Jinasena and Gunabhadra, edited with Hindi translation by Pannalal Jain (Varanasi: Bharataiya Jnanapitha, 1944).

51. sa ca dharmah puranarthah puranam pañcadhah viduh /
ksetram kalas ca tirtham ca satpumsas tadvicestitam //
(*Adi Purana* 2.38)



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52. See *Adi Purana* 18.51-60.

53. See the stotra of 1008 names of Rsabha in *Adi Purana* 25.99-217.

54. manusyajatir ekaiva jatinamodayodbhava /
vrttibhedahitad bhedac caturvidhyam ihasnute //
(*Adi Purana* 38.45)

55. *Trisastisalakapurusacaritra* of Hemacandrasuri, trans. Helen M. Johnson, vol. 1, Gaekwad Oriental Series vol. 51, (1931), 343ff.

56. See P. S. Jaini, *The Jaina Path of Purification* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979), chap. 4.

57. tesam krtani cihnani sutraih padmavhayan nidheh /
upattair brahmasutrahvair ekad ekadasantakaih //
gunabhumikrtad bhedat klptayajñopavitinam /
satkarah kriyate smaisam avratas ca bahih krtah //
(*Adi Purana* 38.21-2)

58. sadhu vatsa krtam sadhu dharmikadvijapujanam /
kintu dosanusango 'tra ko 'py asti sa nisamyatam // . . .
tatah kaliyuge 'bhyarne jativadavalepatah /
bhratacarah prapatsyante sanmargapratyanikatam //
te 'mi jatimadavista vayam lokadhika iti /
pura duragamair lokam mohayanti dhanasaya //
ahimsalaksanam dharmam dusayitva durasayah /
codanalaksanam dharmam posayisyanty ami bata //

papasutradhara dhurtah pranimaranatatparah /
vartsyadyuge pravartsyanti sanmargaparipanthinah //
dvijatisarjanam tasman nadya yady api dosakrt /
syad dosabijam ayatyam kupakhandapravartanat //
(*Adi Purana* 39.45-54)

59. na svato 'gneh pavitratvam devatarupam eva va /
kintv arhaddivyamurtijyasambandhi pavano 'nalah //
tatah pujangatam asya matva 'rcanti dvijottamah /
nirvanaksetrapujavat tatpuja 'to na dusyati //
vyavaharanayapeksa tasyesta pujyata dvijaih /
Jainair adhyavaharyo 'yam nayo 'dyatve 'grajanmanah //
(*Adi Purana* 40.88-90)

60. *Trisastisalakapurusacaritra* 1.6.546-56. See P. S. Jaini, "The Pure and the Auspicious in the Jaina Tradition," *Journal of Asian Perspectives* (Leiden) 1, no. 1 (1985): 69-76.

61. nirdistasthanalabhasya punar asya ganagrahah /
syan mithyadevatah svasmad vinihsarayato grhat //
iyantam kalam ajñanat pujitah sma krtadaram /
pujyas tv idanim asmabhir asmatsamayadevatah //
tato 'pamrsitenalam anyatra svairam asyatam /





iti prakasam evaitan nitva 'nyatra kvacit tyajet //
(*Adi Purana* 39.45-47)

62. See M. Winternitz, *A History of Indian Literature*, vol. 2, 445-49.

63. *Uvasagadasao* [i.e., *Upasakadasah*], published in English as *The Religious Profession of an Uvasaga*, trans. A. F. R. Hoernle, 2 vols., Calcutta: Bibliotheca Indica, 1888-90.

64. Draupadi ca drutam malam kandhare 'bhyetya bandhure /
akarot karapadmabhyam Arjunasya varecchaya //
viprakirna tada mala sahasa sahavartinam /
pañcanam api gatresu capalena nabhasvata //
tatas capalalokasya tattvamudhasya kasyacit /
vaco vicerur ity uccair vrtah pañcanayety api //
(*Harivamsa Purana* 45.135-37)

65. atyantasuddhavrttesu ye 'bhyakhyanaparayanah /
tesam tatprabhavam papam ko nivarayitum ksamah //
sadbhutasyapi dosasya parakiyasya bhasanam /
papahetur amoghah syad asadbhutasya kim punah //
prakrtanam api pritya samanadhanata dhane /
na strisu trisu lokesu prasiddhanam kim ucyate //
mahapurusakotisthakutadosavibhasinam /
asatam katham ayati na jivha satakhandatam //
(*Harivamsa Purana* 45.152-55)

66. See *Trisastisalakapurusacaritra*, vol. 5, G.O.S. vol. 139, 198-202.

67. Bhattaraka Vadicandra (ca. 1600) in his *Pandava Purana* devotes the first sarga to describe the geneology of the Pandavas as allegedly found in the *Siva Purana*: Siva-Puranabhimata-Pandavotpattivarnano nama prathamah sargah. See my article "The *Mahabharata* Motifs in the Jaina *Pandava Purana*," referred to above in note 27.

68. For the Puranic passages dealing with the Buddhavatara, see R. C. Hazra, *Studies in the Upapuranas*, vol. 1, (Calcutta: Sanskrit College, 1958), 144ff.; Ramshankara Bhattacharya, *Itihasa-Purana ka anushilan* (in Hindi) (Varanasi, 1963.), 280-

86.

69. See P. S. Jaini, "The Disappearance of Buddhism and the Survival of Jainism: A Study in Contrast," *Studies in the History of Buddhism*, ed. A. K. Narain, (Delhi, 1980), 81-91.

70. The Dasaratha-Jataka (Jataka no. 461) and the Ghata-Jataka (Jataka no. 454), respectively, refer to Rama and Kanha. See *The Jataka*, ed. V. Fausboll, (reprint; London: Pali Text Society, 1963).

71. . . . bhagavan paramarsibhih prasadito Nabheh priyacikirsaya tadavarodhayane Merudevyam dharman darsayitukamo vatarasananam sramananam rsinam urdhvamanthinam suklaya tanuvavatatara. *Srimad Bhagavata* 5.3.20.





72. yasya kilanucaritam upakarnya Konka-Venka-Kutakanam raja 'rhan namopasiksya kalav adharma utkrsyamane bhavitavyena vimohitah svadharmapatham akutobhayam apahaya kupathapakhandam asamañjasam nijamanisaya mandah sampravartayisyate. yena ha vava kalau manujapasada devamayamohitah svavidhiniyogasaucacaritravihina devahelanany apavratani nijanijecchaya grhnana asnananacamanasuacakesol-luñcanadini kalina 'dharmabahulenopahatadhiyo brahmabrahmanyajña-purusalokavidusakah prayena bhavisyanti. te ca hy arvaktanaya nijalokayatraya 'ndhaparamparaya asvastas tamasy andhe svayam eva prapatisyanti. *Srimad-Bhagavata* 5.6.9-11.

73. P. S. Jaini, "Jina Rsabha as an *Avatara* of Visnu," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 40, no. 2, (1977): 321-337.

74. Sanatkumara uvaca:
asrjac ca mahatejah purusam svatmasambhavam /
ekam mayamayam tesam dharmavighnartham Acyutah //
mundinam mlanavastram ca gumphipatrasamanvitam /
dadhanam puñjikam haste calayantam pade pade //
vastrayuktam tatha hastam ksiyamanam mukhe sada /
dharmeti vyaharantam hi vaca viklavaya munim //
. . . Visnuh . . . vacanam cedam abravit /
yad artham nirmito 'si tvam nibodha kathayami te /
Ariham nama te syat tu hy anyani subhani ca / . . .
Apabhramsamayam sastram karmavadamayam tatha /
srautasmartaviruddham ca varnasramavivarjitam //
gantum arhasi nasartham mundas Tripuravasinam /
tamodharmam samprakasya nasayasva puratrayam //
tatas caiva punar gantva Marusthalyam tvaya vibho /
sthatavyam ca svadharmena kalir yavat samavrajet //
tatah sa mundi paripalayan Harer
ajñam tatha nirmitavams ca sisyan /
yathasvarupam caturas tadanim
mayamayam sastram apathayat svayam //
*Siva Purana* ed. Ramateja Shastri Pandeya (Varanasi, Pandita Pustakalaya), 2 (Rudrasamhita), 5 (Yuddhakanda), fourth *Adhyaya*, 1-24.

75. See *Prabhavakacarita* of Prabhacandra, ed. Jinavijaya Muni, Singhi Jain Series, no. 13 (1940), 187-88.

76. Vyasasandarbhitakhyane sriGangeyah pitamahah /
yuddhapravesakale 'sav uvaca svam paricchadam //
mama pranaparityage tatra samskriyatam tanuh /
na yatra ko 'pi dagdhah prag bhumikhande sada sucau //
vidhaya nyayyasangramam muktaprane Pitamahe /
vimrsya tadvacas te 'ngam utpatyasya yayur girau //
amuñcan devatavani kvapi tatrodyayau tada //
tatha hi

atra Bhismasatam dagdham Pandavanam satatrayam /
Dronacaryyasahasram tu Karnasamkhya na vidyate //
(*Prabhavakacarita* 188, 159-62)

77. raja srutvaha tatsatyam vakti Jainarsir esa yat /
atra brutottaram tathyam yady asti bhavatam mate // . . .
uttaranudayat tatra maunam asisriyams tada / . . .
rajña satkrtya Suris cabhasyata svagamoditam /
vyakhyanam kurvatam samyag dusanam nasti vo 'nv api //
(*Prabhavakacarita* 188, 167-71)



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Chapter 8

Note: While this bibliography is extensive, perhaps excessively so for a paper of this length, it is by no means exhaustive. It is intended merely to provide a starting point for any person interested in pursuing research on the Jaina Puranas. I have included none of the extensive secondary literature in Kannada, Tamil, or Marathi, as I have no means of assessing its quality. There are also many Ph.D. dissertations that have been done over the past twenty years in India devoted to studies

of one or more Jaina





Puranas; for a large but incomplete list of these, see S. Jain and A. P. Singh (1983).

Abbreviations

BJP Bharatiya Jñanapitha Prakasana
JOI *Journal of the Oriental Institute* (Baroda)
JSSS Jaina Samskrti Samraksaka Sangha
MDJG Manikacanda Digambara Jaina Granthamala
PTS Prakrit Text Society

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